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『さあ、堕天使の将軍さん！　これ以上の悪さは許さないのよう！』
「――という感じなのだけれど、あなたから見てどうなのかしら？　幼なじみのソーナさんがこれを演じていることに」
「これは、ソーナが決めた大切な意志だと思うの」

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[Imperial Purpure] Team VS [Spear of the Heavenly Emperor] Team ---The Proof of a Hero---

Power.1 The Indestructible Great King

That man… was born with the greatest spear in his hand.

That man… was born without anything to himself.

Right after the ending of the [Joker of the Heaven] match led by Dulio.

We went to the capital of the Underworld [Lilith]. The reason was…

“Hahahaha, looks like your luck has now ran out! Chichiryuutei!”

In front of the huge outdoor stage, [Evil Dragon General Vabo], Bova wearing an evil costume, mocked me who was kneeling in front of him in my armour.

I also…

“*Kuuu*! Never would I have expected [Evil Dragon General Vabo] to be this strong…”

… and said such heroic line.

All the children filling up the seats cheered me on.

“Chichiryuutei! Don’t lose!”

“Stand up!”

Currently, we are in the middle of the [Chichiryuutei] outdoor show!

That’s right, in order to perform these shows and other events, ORC members came to visit the underworld.

International Rating game and the school are important but these are also important works for us too.

This [Chichiryuutei] event that we are currently participating in link closely to the television show. This was a special event which was celebrating the release of the new series of [Chichiryuutei] so it was decided that we, the main heroines, would participate.

… And the [Evil Dragon General Vabo] that Bova is taking on is the new enemy in the new series.

Of course, in the television show and other events, the actors that look like us would put on the show…

But for Bova, who only just recently joined my team, to be included in [Chichiryuutei]… man… the people of the House of Gremory sure act fast on these kinds of stuff…

… Anyway, in this show I, [Chichiryuutei] is struggling against [Evil Dragon General Vabo] and is currently in a pinch. It is good to show off the power of the brand new enemy from the start.

“I can’t lose! I will get up no matter what and fight you!”

I got up and charged at Bova but Bova moved his huge body as if he really is intending to hurt me and sent punches and kicks toward me. I also pretended to be hit by his attack and staggered backward a bit and collapsed.

“Hahahahaha! Is this all you’ve got, Chichiryuutei? I had my hopes up since you defeated the Dark Knight Fang… but you’ve disappointed me! I didn’t realise how weak you are, Chichiryuutei! Hahahahahah!”

Bova was perfectly acting as the villain. His evil laughs were spot on as well.

… This guy, is he naturally talented at acting? I’ve seen yet another side of him.

“Uuuwah! Chichiryuutei is being defeated!”

“That dragon, scarrrrry!”

Children were all focused on the show as well but it looks like Bova’s acting also scared them quite a bit. Well, I guess being impressionable is also still quite good, right?

“STOP!”

Then a bishounen appeared along with a bishounen voice… It was [Dark Knight Fang] Kiba in his costume.

“*KYAAAAAAAAAA*! KIBA-KUUUUUUUN!”

“FAAAAAAANG KINGHT-SAMMMMMMA!”

When he appeared, this time it was the mothers in the audience who accompanied the children that screamed in

joy. They were quiet just until now but as soon as he appeared they went crazy.

Fang was the main villain until the last season but this time he appears as Chichiryuutei's ally. That Kiba pointed his demonic sword towards [Evil Dragon General Vabo] and said.

"Idiot! That Chichiryuutei is my pray! I will not let you take him for yourself!"

When he shouted that, Bova returned the shouting with rage in his eyes.

"You traitor! You're taking Chichiryuutei's side! I'll rip you apart as well!"

That's right, in the new season, [Dark Knight Fang], who stayed as the antagonist until the last season is taking up a role as the protagonist in the new season. Thanks to that, the rating amongst mothers went up.

Fang then replied with a cynical smile on his face.

"Don't mistake, the person who will defeat Chichiryuutei is me! I cannot give that away to anyone else!"

""" *KYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA*! FANG KNIGHT-SAMAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"""

Hearing his proclaim, the mothers went hysteric once again.

Fang charged at Bova with his sword but… that large dragon acted as if he threw Fang away with only a single punch. Fang dropped his sword and taking Bova's (fake) punch, he got blasted backward.

On top of the stage, Chichiryuutei and Fang, the two most popular characters, are in dire situation. The Children who were all watching the show became anxious and a few started to cry as well.

“Uwahahahahaha! Chichiryuutei! Fang! Both of you are nothing! You guys are nothing compared to I, Evil Dragon General Vabo!!! Uwahahahaha!”

Bova’s smirk rang around the arena and when both I and Kiba were pushed to the end, a voice was heard.

“STOP RIGHT THERE!”

Small firework went off on the stage and using the lift on the stage floor, a person in golden armour appeared.

“Evil Dragon General Vabo! I, [Leonis Rex], won’t let you get away with your misdeeds!”

The person who said that to Bova was wearing the Lion King’s costume and he is Sairaorg-san! The main focus of this show was to promote Sairaorg-san’s hero, [Leonis Rex]!

In truth, the character [Leonis Rex] is big hit like [Chichiryuutei] in the land of House of Bael and they’ve been getting quite good reception.

So, the House of Gremory and the House of Bael decided to collaborate in this Hero business and for the first time, [Chichiryuutei] and [Leonis Rex] decided to join forces.

And the result of this was…

“Lion-san~~!”

“Leonis Rex!!”

“Woah! Chichiryuutei and Leonis in one place!”

In contrast to before, the atmosphere in the arena got really heated. All the people, let alone children, who were distressed at seeing me about to be defeated were all eccentric now.

Looking at both me and Fang on the ground, Sairaorg-san shouted.

“Stand up, Chichiryuutei, Fang! Stand up and look forward! The things that we must fight is… both the enemy and our-self!”

……!

… He’s just reading off a script, but when it’s Sairaorg-san saying those words, I get deeply moved and I got a sudden surge of energy!

I stood up and boosted my aura!

“I’m aware of that!”

“Fufu, looks like even I wasn’t myself there!”

Kiba also grabbed his sword and stood up.”

“Hahahahahahahahah! You’ve got one more ally for yourself but do you really think that’s enough to defeat I, Evil Dragon General Vabo!”

Looks like even he’s having fun as he shouted out his script.

I, Leonis Rex, Dark Knight Fang. When us three stood next to each other, the mood in the arena lit up. In midst of that, I shouted to the other two,

“Let’s go! Leonis, Fang!”

“”Let’s go!!””

As three of us charged towards Bova.

The event drew to a climax.

A few hours after the end of the show, we took a rest and we moved to another theatre located in [Lilith] for our next show.

In truth, our schedule today is filled with these shows all day. We have Hero shows at the outdoor theatres during the day time and in the evening, there’s going to be a talk show between young [King]s.

The topic for the show is [The Future of International Rating Game, Azazel-Cup].

As for the people appearing in the show, they were young devils who are currently participating in the international rating game and are super star amongst the citizen of the underworld. Rias, Sairaorg-san and as honourable as it is, I, was also chosen to participate in the show as well.

Sona-san and Seekvaria-san couldn’t make it this time due to their schedule not fitting in with the talk show so they won’t be in the show today.

The talk show host stood in front of the podium and explained to the audience of today’s topic.

“Then without further ado, we’ll call upon the three most anticipated [King]s in this game. Please come forward.”

I, Rias and Sairaorg-san came up to the stage while receiving applause, and as instructed by the host, we sat down on the chairs prepared for us.

When I looked around the stadium… I couldn’t see any empty seats at all. In fact, it seems like there were a lack of chairs as some of the people people were watching us standing up.

The host started to talk again.

“Now that Sairaorg-sama, Rias-sama and Hyoudou Issei-san has arrived, we’ll start the show. To begin, the beginning of the [Azazel-Cup], the international rating game which has been a main focus between many different factions…”

The host began the talks by briefly mentioning some of the highlights of the games so far and got to the current events of the game.

He also talked about the games that Sairaorg-san, Rias and I have participated and also asked about our feelings about the game as well.

At the host’s question, Sairaorg-san replied with.

“I am very thankful that many different factions came together to bring this game. As one of the participants, I am honoured to be included in such game and as one of the devils in the game, I cannot let my guard down.”

… And gave such serious answer. And Rias, who received a different question…

“As a game that anyone can participate, I think there’s a great chance we can find someone who deserved some attention or possesses hidden genius or any unknown

talents. I want to meet those people and fight against those people. It's most likely that we'll be able to meet people who can, not only help during the competition, but also help the underworld greatly."

And gave her opinion.

I then received the question, 'As a person promoted to a high-class devil and leaving Rias-sama's peerage, what is your reason to participate in the competition?'

Ah, I'm sure that the people of the underworld and various media would find that interesting.

I replied…

"I… always dreamed of becoming a High-Class devil, and I've worked hard in order to make that dream of mine come true… I've nearly died multiple times but… I've become a High-Class devil and I'm happy that I got this recognition from many people. I don't have any noble or cool theory or idea like Sairaorg-san or Rias…-sama, but I want to know how much I can do as I am right now in this competition… And I thought that all the rivals that I fought before are participating so I couldn't just sit behind and do nothing."

… And I told them the truth.

Oh god, I'm so embarrassed that everyone here's listening to me so seriously!

The host opened his mouth again.

"As expected the match between yourself and the arch-rival Hakuryuukou is getting a lot of attention. For yourself, Hyoudou-san, is the fight against Hakuryuukou important to you?"

“Yes of course, since we’ve promised to have a show down at a later date. I think that this international rating game is the perfect place to have such a show-down.”

When I gave them my true feelings, the entire stadium went ‘Ooooo’ and the mood got excited.

Ah~ that guy is entering the competition under ‘Lucifer’ so not only to other factions but even the citizens of the underworld now knows that he’s the descendent of Lucifer.

The name ‘Lucifer’ is absolute and unlike Serzech-sama, who only inherited the name, he’s the descendent of the real ‘Lucifer’ so the voices supporting him has grown steadily. However, it looks like he’s ignoring that.

And just like that, the show continued with us answering so many different questions…

It happened when Sairaorg-san was answering a question about ‘the future of Devil players who are participating in the game’.

“… Therefore, I think that it’s not a bad thing for pro players to lose against other team but rather, they should take that as a lesson to create a much better team…”

And just then, someone shouted from the audience.

“… YOU CHEAT!”

One male audience stood up and looked at us… no…. glared at Sairaorg-san and shouted.

When we thought that was all…

“Yes! You used the [King] piece, didn’t you?!”

“That’s why you’re that strong without having any powers!”

“You’re the heir to the Great King, aren’t you?! Then there’s no doubt you’ve used it!”

Words of criticism came flooding in and the number of people standing up from their seat increased.

“Please everyone, calm down. This is time for International Rating game not…”

The host tried his best to keep the situation under control. But the voice of resentment grew and grew.

Another audience couldn’t hold his anger and shouted.

“You protected politicians in the Great King factions as well! I bet you did that to hide your own dirt!”

They even started to go after the politicians as well! I knew that because of their use of [King] Piece, the House of Bael were currently scrutinised by the people…

Anyway, they think that Sairaorg-san has gotten stronger because he used the [King] Piece?! There’s no way he’ll do such a stupid thing! This guy had it worse than any other people here!

“Scum!”

When someone shouted that at him…

“Scum! Scum!”

“””Scum! Scum! Scum!”””

People started to shout Scum at Sairaorg-san. It wasn't like everyone was shooing at him but it was significant enough that they couldn't be just ignored.

Meanwhile, Sairaorg-san kept his silence and took the abuse. He wasn't cross and kept his composure.

I stood up from my seat.

Stop it! This guy is different! This guy wouldn't touch things such as the [King] Piece…

When I was going to defend Sairaorg-san, Rias blocked me.

"Ise, just watch."

"… But! If we just leave it like this…!"

Rias then calmly continued.

"… If you step in now, even your peerage will be under suspicion… and Sairaorg definitely don't want that."

"Even so, I…!"

When I wouldn't back down, Rias then said this.

"You're now [King], so protecting your peerage is now your duty. And don't worry about this, all three of us can just shut them up with our results. And without any results, any of your words won't reach them."

……!

After hearing what she had to say, I couldn't do anything but to grind my teeth. Sairaorg-san also looked at me as if to tell me to calm down, shook his head.

“You cheat! Go get burn by the angels!”

Curses were still thrown at Sairaorg-san while he was getting escorted out by the security.

I… clenched my fist as hard as I could.

He didn’t use that thing. This guy wouldn’t ever go near such crap as a [King] Piece…!

As someone who exchanged blows with this person, I understood him very well.

In that fist, there was no such thing as a [King] piece…!

The fight between me and Sairaorg-san was real…!

Even during that time, Sairaorg-san said to those who were getting escorted away.

“… Please watch my future fights. I request everyone here to watch my battles from now on. That’s all I could say at this point.”

“……”

When Sairaorg-san said such things, people who were escorted away kept their silence.

… I, who felt the attacks against Sairaorg-san as they are my own during the interview and even after the interview, couldn’t calm myself down from this…

After finishing the talk show and the hero shows, we stayed at a high-class hotel at [Lilith]. And the morning after, I snuck out and went to a nearby park around here.

I saw this place out of my hotel window.

Sairaorg-san was training at a remote part of the park alone. After seeing him training in his work clothes, I couldn’t bare it any longer and followed him.

I did hear that his peerage was also staying in the hotel nearby but for him to train straight after what happened last night…

It seems like he’s done with the warm up as he got ready to run. When I approached him, he turned his attention towards me.

Looking at him, I asked.

“Do you mind if I run with you?”

He was initially shocked at my offer but quickly changed his expression to a bitter smile and nodded.

We then ran through the early morning of the capital in silence with me alongside him.

After running for few km, he talked to me.

“Physical training… this is something you need to do regularly. That’s why this is one of trainings that I trust the most.”

“I also ran through mountains like I was going to die when I first came here so I’m confident in my physicals as well.”

Now that I think about it, whenever I come to the underworld, I get mixed up in really weird stuff. When I first came here, I got chased by Old-man Tannin through the mountain but thanks to that, I’ve gotten quite confident at my basic strength.

Then Sairaorg-san said this while running alongside me.

“Looks like you got mad on behalf of myself.”

……

… Looks like he’s talking about last night. My body trembled for the entire time while I heard various curses directed toward Sairaorg-san.

“… I’m so sorry that I couldn’t be of any help back then.”

I apologised to him. All I could do right there was just be angry for him but not help him anyway. I couldn’t think of anything I could say towards the comrade that I fought alongside with many times.

This position of [King] held me back in the end.

But as if understanding me feelings, Sairaorg-san laughed wholeheartedly.

“Hahaha, I’m thankful of that gesture alone. As a [King], you shouldn’t do something that may get on the nerve of others. This is basically my destiny for being born into House of Bael. To tell the truth, I’m slightly happy that I got into this situation in the first place.”

Then Sairaorg-san continued.

“This is definitely not an easy life… but many people regards me as the Devil of the House of Bael, or the Heir of House of Bael. It’s a painful and tiring situation… but it’s worth it, and I genuinely want to sort this situation out as well.”

……

… even after hearing those words, even after being questioned of his powers, this person takes pride in being a [Bael].

If you look at this person’s life until now, it would be sure that he has gained this position after many hardships.

Whatever things comes his way, this person won’t flutter at all since he already went through countless number of pain and suffering to get to this stage.

Still running beside me, Sairaorg-san spoke brightly.

“Hyoudou Issei. I am just a stupid devil. Towards my comrades or toward citizens, I can’t do anything but to be honest. I’ve trained this body after countless losses and being down, thinking to myself that I’ll win next time and that I need to move forward.”

Sairaorg-san stopped running and lifted his fist up in to the sky.

“… That I can reach anywhere with this fist and keep training.”

His rough fist….

Riddled with scar and hard skin. It was so well trained that it doesn’t look like a fist of a noble prince.

Sairaorg-san narrowed his eyes and continued.

“… Unfortunately, others are born with their natural talent. You’ve surely experienced this as you fought until now.”

I’ve fought against many others that were considered geniuses. Kiba, Vali, Cao Cao… Men that I fought, with only a

fraction of the training that I've done, got much stronger than me in no time. That made me genuinely angry but at the same time I felt the 'wall'.

I, Sairaorg-san or Saji. We must run and train like this in order not to lose against all these geniuses.

However, Sairaorg-san declared.

"But there are limits to what talent alone can do and soon these people will realise their limit as well… However, Hyoudou issei, there is no end to patching what you lack and nothing but to train in order to do so. If what you lack is speed, then you need to train that. If you lack physical strength then you need to train your physical strength. If you need to be more unpredictable, then you just need to interact with the unknowns."

Sairaorg-san then placed his fist on my arm.

"… You must train everything in order to maximise your abilities. The true enemy is yourself who deny your own ability."

……

… Suddenly Azazel-sensei flashed through my head. I've heard [Believe in your potential] many times from him before.

Yes, Sairaorg-san is right. When I was lacking something, I searched for any ways to make myself stronger and the result of all that is the current me.

I want to tell that to the past me, the me from a few months ago, the me from half a year ago and the me from a year ago…

… that the answer to worry you are having is the answer itself.

I was so touched by what Sairaorg-san has said but I noticed something from behind and turned around.

… And there stood a person so unexpected to the point it was like an illusion.

“Ah, what a coincidence.”

It was a guy wearing Hanfu [1] on top of his uniform… Cao Cao!

Well that’s obvious! This guy, who’s participating in this game as an underling of Indra, just appeared in front of me in the capital of the underworld!

“….!! Cao Cao! What are you doing here?!”

When I asked that in surprise, he just shrugged.

“Well I had something to do. I’ve got permission.”

He replied in a brief manner… wait, even if you’ve got permission, the fact that you’re here is what makes it more surprising.

Understandably, he did turn this place into utter chaos during the [Monster Crisis]…

There’s another weird thing about him. This guy isn’t carrying that spear that he always has around him. Since he’s not tapping his shoulder with his spear out of his own habit, it really seemed out of place. That’s how much he carried that spear with him.

“… Huh, is there something on my face or something?”

Cao Cao asked me since I was staring at him.

“Ah, it’s just that this is probably the first time seeing you without your spear.”

“Fu, if I walk around in the underworld this early in the morning with my spear, then you guys are going to try to kill me, right?”

That was his reply while smiling a bit.

Well true, that’ll be a headache later…

… meanwhile the person next to me have been giving Cao Cao a cold stare.

In an unlikely event in which by chance, the two [Kings] that are going to go head to head in the next game, they are meeting right now…

Sairaorg-san and Cao Cao exchanged glares silently for a few seconds.

Cao Cao then said only one thing as he went past Sairaorg-san.

“I’m looking forward to the match.”

And Sairaorg-san replied with a provocative smile.

“Then I’ll see you at the arena.”

…and like that, the greetings between the incarnation of strength and tactics came to an end. They don’t need to use words since just looking at each other is enough to understand each other.

Both fans and the participants of the games are looking forward to the next match.

And so am I!

While looking at the back to Cao Cao with Sairaorg-san, a question just popped into my head. I crossed my arms and tilted my head.

Looking at me like that, Sairaorg-san asked me.

“What’s up?”

“Ah it’s just that that guy… I only meet him when something big is about to happen.”

After Kyoto, I met him in really serious situations. Even after he became an underling of Sakra, I only met him during big fights or during a huge event.

Thinking back, he was there during my promotion as well.

Then Sairaorg-san said to me,

“Hmm, because of the power he possesses, he would have been the centre of attention from the beginning as well. I’m sure that person is also living a life much more complicated than we think.”

… Life, that can’t be summed up as attention.

… Life of a man who possess the World’s greatest Longinus, I can just about begin to imagine what that could be…

Imagining those who couldn’t live due to the sacred gear in their body, that guy must have been also…

“… I wonder why he decided to challenge the mystical beings?”

I said something that Cao Cao said when I first met him.

Since he’s human, he wants to challenge the mystical beings… he said that it’s always been humans who topple the monsters….

“… I wonder. It’s not like us Devils can understand the [System] that the God of the Bible created.”

After saying that, Sairaorg-san started to run again.

Running with him, I looked behind… Looked towards Cao Cao and there, I saw the back of Cao Cao slowly getting smaller and smaller.

…The back of that person, without any hostility nor with his spear, looked like the back of a normal man of my age…

1. Jump up ↑ historical/traditional dress fo Han people Wikipedia

Power.2 The Hero and the Youths

This boy was born in a village in a remote mountain somewhere in China.

The house in which the boy was born into have been traditional farmers, the boy’s grandparents, great grandparents and so on have all lived their whole lives in that village as farmers.

This boy also started his farm life as he grew older, learning how to farm from his parents day in and day out.

It was a very simple farming village. There were no televisions, let alone electricity in the village.

The house the boy lived in was just a shack, but so were all the other houses in the village.

That was the way of life over there.

The boy enjoyed running around the mountain and playing with children his age.

His heart jumped whenever he heard stories with ‘monsters’ in, and he liked playing ‘monster hunting’ with his friends in the mountain.

That boy… had a place that he went to whenever he was happy or sad or scolded. His own special seat… he climbed up the tallest tree in the village and looked up to the nameless mountain in front of him.

The tallest mountain he could see from his village… the boy’s dream was to climb to the top of that mountain one day.

The calming and static life at the village, the boy thought his life wouldn't change in his lifetime.

But at last, one day, an incident happened.

It happened when he went into the mountain to play with his friends again. He was the only one who got lost and ended up losing his way deep inside the forest.

The thing that he met there… was a monster that he had never seen before.

The boy saw the monster eating an animal by chance, and unfortunately, he was spotted by the monster right there. The monster said that it was his first time in a long time to have tasted a human and jumped at the boy.

The boy ran for his life as fast as he could, but since it was a dense forest he couldn’t run as fast as he wanted. With his childish steps, there was no way he would be able to outrun a monster.

Then when he was about to be eaten by the monster and was giving up on running away, his whole life flashed before his eyes and suddenly he thought of that time when he played the ‘monster hunting’ game with his friends.

… Ahhh, it would be great if I really had a power to defeat monsters…

Just as he thought of that, he felt a pulse deep inside his heart. And with a bright light, an object came out shining with bright light.

… A spear with holy aura around it.

The monster staggered as his body was disintegrated by the light of the spear.

The boy grabbed the spear, and as if he had known how to use the spear his whole life, started to attack the monster.

… A few minutes later, the boy was covered in blood and was standing expressionlessly where the monster used to be.

And about an hour later, the village’s search party found the boy in the forest. Everyone, including the boy’s parents, was shocked at the sight of the boy covered in blood.

After that, his life continued as normal… Except for one thing.

… He was now able to summon that holy spear from his body at will.

He didn’t understand what happened to his body, it was so unbelievable that he didn’t tell his parents nor his friends.

But when he stares at that spear, his mind becomes calm.

For a beautiful spear to appear before his eyes, the eyes of a boy living a normal life in a remote village.

At that moment, he had something that he could ‘show off’ to others.

Half a year later, the boy met another monster.

“Oh ho~ looks like that spear has gone to some troublesome kid.”

It was a monster resembling an old monkey. That monster called himself “Sun Wukong”.

Monkey monster spoke while patting the boy’s head.

“… Hey kiddo, that spear will make a kid’s life living in a remote village like yourself quite difficult. But kiddo, you are you, and that spear isn’t you. You will need to make that spear a part of you.”

After that, the monkey monster said something like ‘right, what should I report back to the heavens’ and made a bitter smile.

Before disappearing, that monster said this to him.

“I don’t know if you know kiddo but the hero of this country [Cao Cao] runs in your body. Well, so far, it’s just running in your body that’s all. To be able to awaken that power and use it is a whole different story… And that’s up to you.”

… [Cao Cao]

It was a name that had no resemblance to his own, a complete stranger’s name. But the word [Hero] stayed with him strongly.

After gaining that spear, the boy experienced countless numbers of mysterious encounters.

And after a while, not only monsters, but even humans started to approach him.

One day coming home after a day’s work at the farm, the boy saw a bunch of men in suits at his house.

His parents smiled as soon as they saw the boy.

“This is great news!”

“Yes, great news indeed!”

Since his parents hugged him tightly while saying that, the boy was surely confused. Even during that, his parents continued.

“You’ve been accepted to a school in the city!”

“This is amazing! You can eat lots of tasty food there!”

The boy’s head was filled with question marks but… a man in suit smiled at him and said.

“You’ve been chosen, and we’ve come to tell your parents the news.”

And then they started to explain what was going on but as they were using all sort of difficult words which the boy couldn’t understand, he couldn’t follow what was going on.

However, he knew one thing for sure. His gaze locked onto his father’s hands.

His father was grabbing onto a thick wad of cash.

Even this small child could understand what was going on.

He’s just been sold.

That night, the boy, only with a small amount of food in his pocket, ran away from his home.

He thought that by leaving the house for few days, he could go back to his normal life after that. But his delusion was shattered by a visitor from a world outside his common sense.

Adults wielding weapons began targeting the boy and just like that, an unequal and struggling life for the boy had started. Waving his holy spear around, the boy ran away from these adults.

Even after being caught by his pursuers, he was able to escape with his life thanks to his spear.

Even after being cornered by wild animals in the middle of the forest, he was able to escape with his life thanks to his spear.

Even after being confronted by human traffickers in one village, he escaped without losing his life thanks to his spear.

Having experienced many events that could change his whole life around in a row, the boy… was able to see the wide world for himself.

Shiny buildings with towers as tall as mountains, roads that could host countless numbers of people once the festival starts…

Even in that huge town his pursuers targeted him… and his spear.

… Give up your spear now! That is an object that the likes of you should never handle!

The day to day life of risking his life continued.

And there were even ones who would recruit him using sweet and tempting words but…

After being sold by his parents and being chased by many people, the boy became a person who couldn’t trust anything but his spear.

And just like that, a few years after leaving his home village….

The boy left China for another country.

While meeting and observing people and cultures that he had never seen before, he began to believe in something.

… I’ve got this spear in my possession. With this, I will be able to go anywhere and will be able to beat anyone.

While he was on the run, he awakened his talent and he learnt the abilities of his spear as well.

And after denouncing his own name, he began to use the name of the hero that the monkey demon used… [Cao Cao]. Also he had learnt that his spear is one of the [Sacred Gears] and of those, one of the special [Longinus], and the strongest of all… one of the [Relics].

The boy… Cao Cao then roamed around the Earth and after becoming an adult, he visited his town of birth once again.

While traveling around the world, he had learnt that his village is a very small part of the entire world. And most of all, learnt the terrifying power of this object called [Money]. Cao Cao had reached an understanding that with a huge

sum of money, even basic farmer parents in remote villages are willing to reach a conclusion to give their son away.

It wasn’t like he wanted to fault his parents at this stage, nor was he intending to stay in that village any longer. But he wanted to see the faces of his parents at least once.

But the house that he had once lived… had become deserted.

His parents no longer lived there.

When he asked around the village, they started to tell him the story of what happened.

After their son ran away, it was said that his parents were visited by an agent of a certain faction and his parent decided to give information about their son away.

An information about a person who wields the world’s strongest [Longinus] is precious. Information that could be used to lead that user to their side was too great of a temptation.

On top of that, the money that their parents had earned by selling information about him was so great and they had learned the joy of spending. For people who had lived all their lives poor, it was a turning point.

Of course, people who never had known the joy of spending would also not know how to spend sensibly… and not long after having lost their sight to money, they had accumulated a huge amount of debt.

Day after day, getting chased by the debt collectors, the paths that they had chosen was…

The villager who was telling Cao Cao the story pointed at the empty house and finished.

“… They hung themselves there.”

……..

… That was the final answer that those two had given him.

… I wonder whether if I weren’t born with this spear, would our lives be peaceful?

Cao Cao often thought like that, but quickly he shook his head.

… I or his parents, we are all weak humans.

With or without the spear, that doesn’t change the fact that they are weak. Even with the blood of a hero and possessing the spear, he wouldn’t be able to change the outcome back then.

If I had fought there instead of running away, his parents may not have met their demise. If he talked with them instead of running away, all of them might have survived.

It could have happened… it could have… it could have…

All the possibilities went through his head but… it was all pointless and all he could see was the reality where he was standing in front of his old, empty and abandoned house.

Sitting there for about an hour, Cao Cao left the village.

Swearing that he would never return.

In this world… there is only I.

All I’ve got is this spear. If that’s the case… all I could do is to go as far as I can with this spear.

That was what Cao Cao used as his fuel… his reason for living.

After that, he had met people whose lives had been ruined because of Sacred Gears just like himself. And in the process of meeting them, he learnt about the supernatural beings such as God and such.

… Devils, Maou, dragons, Dragon Kings, Dragon Gods.

They all possess power that transcend human power and they were hiding at the edge of our world.

Naturally, Cao Cao began to think of something.

… Them and I, will my spear ever reach them?

Gaining his first ever objective… purpose in his life, in the blink of a second, many Sacred Gear users gathered around him.

With the Sacred Gears that had ruined their lives, they found new meanings to their lives…

And thus, began the daily life of endless fighting. Cao Cao’s group fought ability users, devils and dragons and showed off their power.

And in the middle of that they met them.

Hyoudou Issei, and Vali Lucifer.

For Cao Cao, who had never cowered in front of any God or demons, the beings that made him truly feel awe and made him shudder were these two… the Two Heavenly Dragons.

One showed off even greater talent than himself.

And the other created miracles far greater than his own spear.

And to Hyoudou Issei’s group, Cao Cao lost his meaning to life, meaning to fight, power, his pride. Lost them all…

Cao Cao, who was reminiscing his past life while walking on the road of Lilith… Capital of the Underworld, looked up to the unique colour of the Underworld sky.

“… I prefer a blue sky though.”

While muttering to himself, he continued to his destination.

In a residential area somewhere in the Lilith, Cao Cao arrived at a corner of that town.

There was… a kindergarten for the children of Devils.

While getting shown around by a guard, Cao Cao went inside the building where he saw a huge man working on a flowerbed.

It was… Hercules.

He is currently part of his team, participating with him in the International Rating Game but in the meantime, he works at this kindergarten.

After that [Monster Crisis] incident he was captured by the government forces and after many tortures, his body was placed with many spells to stop him from causing more trouble.

And the government… Sirzechs Lucifer made him work at this kindergarten instead of putting him in a prison.

Even though Sirzechs knew that back then, it was him who caused a scene with the Kindergarten bus.

At first he was criticised by the populace, especially by the parents of children but… in the end seeing how they all have accepted this decision, it was evident that Maou… Sirzechs Lucifer was regarded very highly by everyone.

If he tried to do something, the spell would activate and burn Hercules’s body to the ground. But the fact that he is still alive means…

It was the end of the day and so many children were coming out of the building, holding their parents' hands.

The children waved at Hercules, who was working on the flowerbed and all said to him…

“See you later ojii-san.”

“See you tomorrow!”

Hercules also waved coldly at the children.

“Careful of the roads. And stop calling me ojii-san.”

At then our eyes met. As if he was saying he didn’t want to show this to me, his expression became bashful but…

He stopped his work and with his face full of dirt, he went towards Cao Cao.

Looking at him like that, Cao Cao spoke.

“Sorry to come to your work place like this.”

“…. Hmph, looks like I showed you something unsightly. I, who have inherited the soul of Hercules is now a kindergarten worker and guard.”

That’s right, one reason why the devils accepted him this fast was that in case of an emergency, they could use him as a security guard. The spell on his body meant that he had no choice but to fight in those cases, and since there have been multiple incidents happening in a row, the fact that a criminal with immense [Strength] is being their [Shield] made devils accept him.

But Cao Cao couldn’t help but think that the way Devils think is a bit too weird, this and the fact that the Oppai Dragon is immensely popular here. He thought it’s probably because of the difference in culture.

Taking his gloves off, Hercules asked Cao Cao.

“The reason you’re here is because… of the Rating Game? That’s probably the only reason why you’ve come all the way here.”

At that, Cao Cao did nothing but shrug.

“That’s one reason. Another is that I wanted to see how you are doing on your job.”

At that moment, Hercules didn’t know how to respond for a bit… but soon scratched his cheeks and smiled.

“… Hmm, even you’ve changed.”

“Right back at you. You know that we’re having a meeting at that place we decided right? Let’s go together.”

At his suggestion, Hercules agreed, but soon looked at the flowerbed and said.

“Can I finish that first? It’s something I need to do.”

After saying yes, Cao Cao pulled his sleeves up as well.

“I’ll help. I‘ve done these jobs before.”

He had never expected that he’d work with the soil in the Underworld but… he also thought that this wasn’t bad at all.

The place that Cao Cao and Hercules headed was… the home of the Catholic Church, the Vatican.

Just like he did in the Underworld, he showed his pass to the guard and went to a facility in the corner of the Vatican.

As a person with one of the artifacts, a Holy Spear, and a person who not long ago considered them his enemy, the fact that he was able to come into a place like this without causing any scene, Cao Cao couldn’t help but sneer at himself.

The place that they arrived at was a facility where young warriors affiliated with the Vatican, trained and lived.

This was the place where they’d be having a meeting about the next match. It was something they did to test what they could do at their current situation but…the truth is that they chose this place as a meeting place out of a whim.

When they went inside the facility’s dining area, a bunch of people from the church were enjoying their meals since it was dinnertime.

They heard that due to an internal reformation of the church, the number of personnel in the church had reduced but… the dining area was still filled with people.

People with some experience noticed the aura given off by Cao Cao and Hercules and turned towards them but after noticing that they had no harmful intentions, they went back to their meals with slightly confused expressions.

Meanwhile, there was a young woman running around the tables.

It was Jeanne.

With an apron on her, she was running around, placing food on the table.

Maybe she noticed their aura as well, she shouted at them.

“Ah it’s you two. Can you wait for a bit? I’m a bit busy. Ah why don’t you guys eat too? I’ll give you guys some discount.”

Cao Cao and Hercules looked at each other and decided that it’d be weird to sit around without any food in front of them in the dining area, so they ordered some pasta.

After dinnertime and with people having mostly left, Jeanne took her apron off, sighed and sat heavily next to Cao Cao and Hercules.

“Haaaaa, I’m busy around here serving and cooking food and you decided to have our next match meeting where I work. Isn’t this too much? Not only that, I never thought the Vatican would even give us permission in the first place.”

Jeanne complained, and until everyone arrived, they decided to have a chit-chat.

Just like Hercules, Jeanne was captured during that [Monster Crisis] incident but unlike Hercules, Jeanne was transferred from the Underworld to the Vatican. After questioning her for her sins, they ultimately put her to work at this facility as a cook.

Just like their Underworld counterparts, the Vatican gave her a hard to understand punishment.

Cao Cao guessed that since she had inherited the soul of one of the holy saints, the Vatican couldn't really give her a harsh sentence.

Ever since then, she’s been cooking for the people that lived here.

“I would have never guessed that you have become one of the training chefs in the Vatican, let alone a warrior training facility.”

When Cao Cao said that with a slightly sarcastic tone, Jeanne laid her chin on the table and complained.

“Same here. Those church people were like ‘If you truly are a person who have inherited the soul of Jeanne D’Arc then shouldn’t you aid the people’ and such.”

Hearing that, Cao Cao and Hercules made a bitter smile.

As if she’s enjoying herself, Jeanne looked at Cao Cao and Hercules and said.

“Well from my eyes, you two changed quite a lot as well… But that’s that, why did the leader involve us two who are

chained by our necks? Are you thinking of asking for the whole world after winning the whole lot?”

Hercules looked at Cao Cao as if he was planning to ask the same question as her.

“… I simply wanted to test my current self.”

Cao Cao answered their question.

“… We all thought that we were geniuses. With blessings from heaven and earth, we thought that we were the true [Heroes] but that was utterly shattered by those red and white dragons.”

Even if they had tools or skills that can produce a miracle, they learnt that they don’t work towards people that cause even bigger miracles to happen continuously. No, they realised that there exists beings that they can’t simply approach that easily.

… To fight two Heavenly Dragons means to call upon destruction on themselves.

That is just evident from themselves, as well as countless numbers of people who have been defeated by their hands.

And from those who were lucky enough to survive from them, they learnt a way to challenge those two.

… It was that they take interest in those who want to fight them in a proper and fair fight, and those who challenge them also gain invaluable growth from it.

… If one wants to combine their desire to get stronger and their will to challenge the Heavenly Dragons, then it is best to fight them in a fair and proper fight.

Also, if possible, I want to avoid being defeated by one of their miracles. So therefore I……

Attempting to read his thoughts, Jeanne spoke after Cao Cao.

“So, you want to fight them fair and square?”

Being surprised that Jeanne read his thoughts, Cao Cao turned his head towards her. When he did, she simply told him that ‘Your thoughts were always on your expression’.

Brushing that off, Cao Cao continued.

“In truth, I don’t even know if I can beat them right now.”

“Woah woah, the once confident leader of the Hero Faction has suddenly become so humble.”

Jeanne teased him.

Hearing that, Cao Cao told them what he really thought.

“… But I’m still angry about before. I’ve realised that the scar in my heart carved by the shape of humiliation, helplessness and fear won’t go away until the day when I finally defeat them, and that’s all there is to it… For that simple reason, I want to fight them, rematch against them and against myself.”

I tried to become a hero with comrades who have the same will as me, but Vasco Strada had looked through that illusion and realised that was just a [Hero Play]. That is why they had lost against Sekiryuutei, who always marched forward no matter what.

Strada-san had said that it’s the people who choose the heroes. Meanwhile, they weren’t even close to being called heroes by the said people.

Maybe there is a need to re-think what is meant by a ‘Hero’, but in the meantime Cao Cao has decided to chase after the Two Heavenly Dragons first.

… Right then, two people entered the dining hall.

“Leader, I’ve brought him.”

The person who spoke first was the user of the Sacred Gear, Shield of Dark Night [Night Reflection] Connla. After losing in Kyoto and even after the disbandment of the Hero Faction, becoming the guard of Seekvaira, he still defended Cao Cao’s side.

The other person was the user of the Sacred Gear [Dreamlike Curse] Marsillio who even after the loss of the Hero Faction, went out against Rias Gremory by himself.

After losing to Hyoudou Issei, he was taken by the Underworld Government and given the same fate as Hercules and just like Hercules, he’s been giving Cao Cao his help.

“Ah thank you Connla, Marsillio.”

Cao Cao’s eyes then looked past these two people, to a young male behind them.

It was a familiar male wearing glasses.

“Didn’t believe you’ll really be here. Wouldn’t have guessed that you would have picked this place as a meeting place.”

It was a young wizard wearing a cape… Georg.

“”Georg?!””

When he entered, both Hercules and Jeanne stood up from their seats.

That’s to be expected. After losing to Hyoudou Issei’s group, his Longinus… Dimension Lost was taken by the Three Factions. And along with Cao Cao and [Annihilation Maker] Leonardo, he was sent to Hell.

Cao Cao left Hell quickly, but he decided to stay there to study magic and therefore he hadn’t entered the tournament yet.

And since that person has just appeared in the Vatican, for Hercules and Jeanne, they would be quite surprised.

Cao Cao casually explained.

“I called him. He said Hades is frequently absent these days, so I told him to come back if that’s the case.”

And apparently Georg agreed easily.

“Well, it looked pitiful that no one in the team could use magic here.”

Georg hadn’t yet officially participated in the game yet, but Cao Cao’s team hadn’t lost yet. It might be because they haven’t yet met up against God-class beings but it’s given that they would soon meet against such foes. Therefore, Cao Cao called him for his help.

Hercules then looked around to those who just entered, as if he was looking for someone.

After a while, he then said.

“So, I guess Leonardo isn’t coming.”

Looks like he’s worried about the boy that was sent to Hell along with Georg.

Georg then answered him.

“He’s back from Hell as well. He’s currently in Grigori’s lab.”

That’s right, it looks like it was predetermined that this would happen once Leonardo came back from Hell. Looks like Grigori made some back-end deals with other members of the Three Factions.

Cao Cao continued.

“It hasn’t been more than a year since the [Monster Crisis] incident, so they won’t allow a person who can give birth to monsters easily.”

That was the biggest worry of the Three Factions. To increase their manpower, they are clearly aiming for the three Longinus users, Cao Cao, Georg and Leonardo. But their sins were too great for them to ignore, especially Leonardo who cannot control his powers well. Considering that they took him to Grigori, where research into Sacred Gears is most active, Cao Cao thought that the Three Factions were being considerate in that case.

And just like that, as the meeting time drew near, the members of the group slowly all arrived.

Amongst them, there were some people who exited the group during the [Khaos Bridgade] days but came back to

help during the tournament.

Hercules noticed a male with neat brown hair and stroked a conversation with him.

“Oh, so you’re also here Pe.”

“Oi, don’t call me Pe. Call me the man-of-men Perseus-sama.”

The person who said that jokingly was the previous executive of the Hero Faction… Perseus.

He’s the person who has inherited the soul of Hero of Greece. Just before the Kyoto incident, due to his differing views to Cao Cao he retired from the group but apparently, he agreed to help out during the tournament.

Even after exiting, there was one time where he went to Cao Cao. The person who brought the Eye of Medusa was none other than Perseus. He was the executive who believed in his own justice the most out of any one and he was also the person with the most loyalty.

That Perseus looked at Georg and was shocked.

“Woah it’s Georg. I heard you got a new job as a Grim Reaper.”

“Well I didn’t really feel like going over the ‘Evil Organisation’ level, so I really didn’t like working at places like Hell.”

Hearing his reply, Perseus laughed wholeheartedly and talked to Jeanne while taking his seat.

“Well that’s true. That’s that, so this is Jeanne’s work place. Oi onee-san, bake me a pizza please.”

“If it’s fine with pasta then eat the ones that they didn’t finish.”

When Jeanne replied in an annoying tone, Perseus simply said ‘Cool’ and started to eat pasta that Cao Cao and Hercules were eating before.

Once the new members, including Perseus, arrived they borrowed the whole dining hall and started their meeting.

“Well it seems like everyone’s here now. I’ll give everyone files on Sairaorg Bael’s team.”

Cao Cao handed paper files to everyone. Inside was information on the team members of the Bael peerage.

Sairaorg Bael’s team had taken alliance with his younger brother’s… Magdaran Bael’s team, with Sairaorg’s peerage as the centre and Magdaran Bael’s peerage taking back-up roles. Depending on the opponents, they were periodically changing their members.

“… Then shall we start the meeting.”

Considering those facts, Cao Cao’s meeting has finally started.

Considering many rules of the game as well as the data of their opponents, they planned moves of each member of the team.

Basically, as the rule of the Rating Game is set on the day of the match, they were planning for all the different rules possible against their opponents.

“… And in case of this rule being picked, I assume this is how the moves will be played out.”

As Cao Cao’s talk about predictions and plans got longer, Hercules seemed to be bored of all the talk, so he asked Cao Cao straight on.

“… Oh hell with it, this takes too long. Oi Cao Cao, just come out with it. Can you dodge all of Sairaorg’s attacks when it comes to it?”

……

When Hercules asked, all eyes focused on Cao Cao.

The most dangerous aspect of the next match was the power of the opponent’s [King], Sairaorg Bael’s attack.

He was the person who boasted the strongest attack out of all the young devils. The power is so great that his normal attacks are equivalent to Seikiryuutei’s attack, and in close quarters combat situations, it was regarded as a power greater than that of Vali Lucifer…

If it ends up becoming a head-on collision it would be over for even those who have inherited the soul of the Heroes, most likely it would give them all fatal wounds.

That is the reason why Hercules asked the strongest member of this group, their leader Cao Cao.

Can you dodge it all? Like that, it showed that everyone here knew even if one hit was given to Cao Cao, it would be the end for even Cao Cao himself.

…The punch of Sairaorg Bael is that fatal.

Sighing, Cao Cao said.

“Well his fighting style is similar to that of Hyoudou Issei. He attacks with ridiculous amount of power and therefore even one hit will cause critical wounds. That kind of person will turn our 99.9999% victory with one punch.”

Even in a situation where they have supressed him, all it takes is one hit… One hit is enough to cause fatal damage to him. After considering all other possibilities and going over all sorts of plans, the only conclusion that can be made was that he must not be hit by that punch.

The punch that was recorded on the International Rating Games files was chilling. Even Ultimate-Class Devils went down with that punch. It broke a seasoned Wizard’s shield magic in the same way as breaking a stick and defeated him so quickly as well.

It was a simple and quick fight. One hit and you’re out… That was the strength of that man.

Hercules spoke.

“As a person who was hit by his punch, I’ll give you an advice. Win or lose, THE PAIN WILL BE WITH YOU FOREVER.”

After losing to Sairaorg, Hercules was captured by the Underworld.

Rubbing his cheek, Hercules narrowed his eyes.

“After being defeated by him… I couldn’t forget the pain that came with his punch.”

Hearing Hercules’s story, everyone just sat there in awe but… there was one person who was laughing during all

that.

“Fufufufu.”

It was Perseus.

“Hey what’s so funny?”

When Hercules said that while pouting, Perseus replied with laughter.

“That’s like tenth time I’ve heard that story now.”

“Shut up!”

Perseus then spoke while fending off an angry Hercules.

“Well now that Georg is back, our team can show them our true power.”

The Wizard… [Dimension Lost] Georg’s return was welcome by everyone present.

But then Jeanne stared at the celling and said.

“It would have been better if that idiot Sieg is with us right now. We are sitting at his old base after all.”

Once the name of Hero Faction’s sub-leader, Siegfried was uttered, the mood became solemn.

He was the coldest out of everyone in the Hero Faction… as well as the most wicked. And thus, he lost his life.

Cao Cao shook his head.

“… If he were here, we wouldn’t have set this place as our meeting place. That place… is his final resting place. Let him

take his rest now.”

Although he was selected by Gram itself, due to his Dragon Sacred Gear he couldn’t bring out the full potential of Gram.

Including Gram, swords he had were taken by the Church and were given to skilled knights.

The question is why Gram chose Siegfried in the first place, and why did it now choose Kiba Yuuto.

There were no definite answers, but Cao Cao could think of a few reasons. After escaping the shackle of the Vatican, Siegfried was… satisfied with himself. By escaping this place, he had fulfilled most of things that he had wanted.

… And towards the owner who had stopped its growth, the Demonic Swords revolted.

… Well that won’t be very accurate either. The truth is only known by the swords probably.

It got to the stage where the mood was too dark to even speak.

Someone knocked on the door of the dining hall. When one of the persons sitting at the table went and opened the door… a few warriors from the church appeared.

Looking at Jeanne sitting there, they hesitantly came into the hall.

“Jeanne-san, we heard that you are about to compete…. C-Cao Cao?! H-Hey, there’s a Holy Spear user here!”

They seemed to be familiar with Cao Cao from the tournament and previous incidents as they hurriedly bowed at him.

[Ah, Lord! The Holy Spear!]

[Amen!]

And they started to offer prayers while bowing at him and seeing that, even Cao Cao got perplexed.

This was the home of the Vatican church and thus, if they see anyone wielding the spear related to the holy trinity, it was natural for those with deep faith to act like this. Not only that, Cao Cao is currently participating (as the Mount Meru Faction) in the International Rating Game so he was famous amongst those who kept up with the games.

Seeing that, Hercules laughed at him.

“Kekeke, it looks like the Holy Spear is finally doing its original work.”

“Shut it.”

When Cao Cao was telling Hercules off, those who were praying were talking to Jeanne.

“… Please do well.”

“We can’t cheer you on as publicly but we all hope that you win.”

That’s right, they were supporting Jeanne.

Even Jeanne looks like she wasn’t expecting this.

Then they continued.

“Jeanne-san’s pasta dish is sometimes too strong but we’re all hooked to it now.”

“Yeah and also, we’ll be sure to fix that broken pizza oven, so please bake us that slightly undercooked margarita pizza again.”

When all those church warriors cheer her on, Jeanne turned her head to the side and got tsundere.

“… Really you guys… I’m a villain, you know? You good kiddies should go and support angels.”

Looking at the scene before his eyes, Cao Cao thought that this was also the Underworld and the Church… Angels' cheeky punishment. They are putting her in such a situation and slowly dissolving Jeanne’s evil intents.

And so is Hercules.

… But in one side of his heart, he realised he was glad that it worked out this way, Cao Cao smiled.

After the warriors returned to where they came from, Georg fixed his glasses and said in an emotional voice.

“… International Rating Game. I would have never guessed that our objectives will be fulfilled like this.”

A tournament in which you could participate regardless of your religion, your place in society. By participating in this event, you would be able to face off against devils, angels, dragons or even gods.

It was a situation that they would have never even dreamed of a few months ago.

Hercules also spoke with a bitter smile on his face.

“Hehe, it’s really bizarre. We, who caused that much trouble before, are now participating in such a legitimate competition. Not only that but this is filled with interesting monsters and Maou-class and God-class opponents.”

They all fought against many factions and faced truly transcendental beings.

Things that they had done a year ago was just utterly madness, but right now there’s a competition that they can participate.

It was, as Hercules said, simply bizarre but… this does not forgive us who've done such unspeakable things.

Cao Cao spoke again.

“Isn’t this so simple? If we win this… then we are the world’s strongest beings.”

Hearing that, everyone there made a confident smile on their faces.

“Right let’s do this.”

Hercules spoke, cracking his knuckles.

“Yup, that’s why we all came together around Cao Cao. Well we might not win, but we can try again next time, right? Until we win.”

Jeanne brushed her hair back.

“Hahaha. It’s not my place to say as a person who cut ties with you after handing over that Eye of Medusa but… I can

believe in the current you Cao Cao. I'll fight in Sieg's stead as well."

Perseus said while laughing.

One comrade has died… but the one we lost before came back.

"I'm honoured to be able to fight with all of you."

"I'm just happy to be here."

When Connla and Marsilio said that, Georg continued.

"Same here. To be able to chase that dream of ours alongside Cao Cao again, this is just like a dream."

… How strong can one get with a human body?

Cao Cao looked at each other's faces.

Everyone here has had their lives turned upside down by Sacred Gears.

To Vasco Strada, we, who played 'Heroes' to vent our anger would have looked foolish.

We are weak humans. Both our body and mind are the weakest of the weak. But we have all inherited the blood of Heroes, and thus, can gain power like that of a miracle. But is there any meaning to all these? Or a significance?

… The answer hasn't been found yet but… just like Hyoudou Issei and Vali Lucifer, Cao Cao and his group wanted to walk forward and not lose their paths once more.

"Then let's definitely win tomorrow."

When Cao Cao said that, everyone nodded…

Seeing that, Cao Cao remembered something.

It was when he returned to his hometown for the first and last time, when he learned of his parents' fate.

For some reason, Cao Cao climbed the mountain which had the largest tree in the village. He just wanted to go up that mountain. The mountain, which looked so huge back in the day, was now something he could walk up to in the blink of an eye. Honestly speaking, he was disappointed.

Thinking that it’s only to the eyes of a child that this would look big, Cao Cao became disappointed.

However, the thing that has waited for him at the top of the mountain was… a grand blue sky.

Seeing that grand scene of a blue sky with his own eyes, he remembered that there is a huge world that seemed vast and unending on top of this mountain.

Then what will there be at the end of that blue sky?

“… I wonder how far I can go over that blue sky, let’s try and find out.”

Those thoughts that he had before, although his methods have changed now, were still in his head even today.

Power 3. A Mad Feast of Power and Technique Begins

The day of the battle between [Team Imperial Purpure] and [Team Spear of the Heavenly Emperor]…

I, Hyoudou Issei, came to the floating city of Agreas in the land of the House of Agares where the match is about to happen. That’s right, this city, which was taken from Qlippoth before, has turned into a spot for the battle once all the checks have been completed to make sure it was safe.

Both the current and former members of the ORC and Student Council decided to meet up and watch the match in the VIP room having prepared for this match.

With this place being the holy place of the Rating Game, the normal seats were filled to the brim.

Amid all that, the announcer, Naud Gamigin-san, who is same one as ours, shouted louder than the audience.

[Now the match that all of you were waiting for is about to begin! The top player of the elite group of the young devils [Rookies Four] Sairaorg Bael-san, owner and wielder of the strongest Longinus holy spear… Cao Cao! The two teams that they lead have created such overwhelming hype even before the match begins! Now we’ll be introducing to you our casters for this game.]

When the camera focused on the person next to him, we saw a God in child form, Shiva!

[How’s it going everyone. It’s the host of this tournament, Shiva.]

He said that with a smile on his face but… why is the God of Destruction and the host of this tournament casting the game!

Looks like even Naud-san is tense.

[Since the God of Destruction himself is in attendance, even I'm getting tensed up!]

[Hahaha! Don't be. If some bad guys decided to come at us right now I'll get rid of them easy. Even if that's a god, that'll be no problem.]

And he goes off and say something like that! It is true that if Shiva is here, this will be the safest place in the universe but still!

Naud-san, also having heard the god's joke, just said [I-It really is reassuring] and was clearly lost for words… after dry coughing once he then resumed shouting into the microphone.

[Now the game in which the VIPs from all over the factions are having all of their interest in will be starting shortly!]

Well that's that but this is really interesting! In the same arena that we and Sairaorg-san fought before, it's now going to be a match between Sairaorg-san and Cao Cao!

The two teams were already glaring at each other on the field. Both sides were emitting such dangerous and unspeakable killing intent from their bodies.

The field was… not the rock island that we fought before. This time it was changed to the official tournament field, although they will be teleported to the playing field soon anyway.

And there was a reason why the match hasn’t yet started.

Cao Cao’s [Queen] has yet to arrive.

… Both the audiences and us were paying close attention to the [Queen].

Rias opened her mouth.

“… When the members were announced for Cao Cao’s team, I’m sure everyone was surprised.”

Yes, she’s right… that’s because on the list of names even someone thick headed like me recognised.

While the audiences were murmuring to themselves, the [Queen] finally appeared.

Through the entrance that Cao Cao’s team has entered, we all heard the sound of horse hooves and suddenly, a gigantic red horse showed itself! And everyone’s attention focused on to the rider!

[… I apologise for my tardiness.]

The person who showed up saying that was… a giant wearing a green Chinese armour!

This long-bearded person had such overwhelming aura to the point it could be felt over the monitor.

He was wielding his Green Dragon Crescent Blade in one hand as well.

When that giant mounted off from his red horse, Cao Cao made a pose of wrapping his right fist with his left hand… Baoquan li and greeted him.

[No, it was an entrance fitting of your name, Guan Gong.]

When Cao Cao uttered the name [Guan Gong] everyone in the stadium couldn’t hide their shock!

[Guan Gong]… Or the name for when he was alive Guan Yu! One of the heroes of Three Kingdoms!

Caster Naud-san shouted on top of his lungs once Guan Yu appeared!

[H-Heeeeeeeeeere he comes! Team Cao Cao’s [Queen], U-U-U-U-Ultimate god-class being! A person who’s been one of the most popular people in the human world Guan Gong! He’s a being who is revered as a god in many countries! The onetime hero of Three Kingdoms General Guan Yu!!! That Guan Gong has entered this Rating Game!!!]

Yes! It’s Guan Yu, that Guan Yu from Three Kingdoms! He’s someone even a thick-headed person like myself knows of! I did hear a legend that once he died, he was worshipped and ended up becoming a god but still…

Shiva explained.

[The person who made Guan Yu participate in this game was that god… Indra. The members of Cao Cao’s team are all trouble makers of [Khaos Brigade]’s Hero Faction after all. Even if I, one of the hosts of this tournament allow their participation, people would be wary, so Indra sent someone who is in charge of their lives along with them… an overseer if you will. Since if they put General Guan Yu, who has been revered, both before and after death, as an ex-terrorist’s overseer, then people would feel safer.]

Shiva’s actually really good at casting… But really, is that the reason why Indra puts heroes such as Guan Yu with Cao

Cao’s team…

“They probably gave Guan Gong an order to cut their head off if they start something sketchy.”

… Kiba said that in a small voice. Well, they are participating in a public tournament so that kind of precaution will be normal…

“I wonder if there is a reason why he’s so late in joining the tournament?”

I asked around. It is weird that he is just joining his team now.

Sona-senpai, who is watching the tournament with us, answered.

“It is most likely that he has been busy since becoming the god of commerce. I heard that any god of commerce in any faction is busy all year around.”

Ah~ that makes sense. I did hear that there are many shrines which serve Guan Yu all over the world.

When Guan Yu… Guan Gong appeared, the leader of the opposite team, Sairaorg-san, stepped forward and asked Guan Gong a question!

[Are you wielding your weapon along with Cao Cao once again?]

Responding to that, Guan Gong streaked his beard and answered Sairaorg-san.

[It’s just that I’m remembering the old days, the Great King of Destruction-san.]

That scene…. Knowing so little of history, that scene just looked like two incredibly strong people having a chatter but…

Others were groaning a little while keeping a close eye between those two.

“For General Guan Yu, a person who were so loyal toward Liu Bi, to stand next to Cao Cao even if he’s a descendant of the real one…“

Sitri-peerage’s [Queen] Shinra-senpai spoke with her hand on her chin.

Following that, Koneko spoke as if she’s explaining things for me.

“Once, Guan Yu used to be Cao Cao’s POW. Cao Cao, who took a liking to Guan Yu, tried to recruit him as his general but Guan Yu was said to have stayed loyal to Liu Bi and went back to him at a later date.”

There might have been a story like that when I researched about Cao Cao before… I was recently researching about the historic Cao Cao in order to make some plans against the current Cao Cao.

I should research about Liu Bi later. I might face off against him on a later date.

With her arms crossed, Rias’s expression froze.

“As a hero, this might be a duty that only he can perform.”

While we were focusing on the conversation between Sairaorg-san and Guan Gong, Naud-san explained today’s game rules having checked that everyone arrived.

[This game is currently going to be [Audience Choice] format! Audiences both in the living room and currently in the arena, please choose from the many rules that you would like to watch!]

That’s right! Prior to the match, they asked the audience, both in the arena and watching on the television, what rule these two teams will be playing by! This was a festive type of match which was being broadcasted to the public, so they raised the entertainment value by doing such a thing!

They normally use this system when two popular teams face off, and even during normal Rating Games it was quite a popular system amongst fans.

It is understandable that if you are a fan of this game, then you would want to watch the two most famous teams fight in a match most fitting of their hype.

Of course, everyone in the ORC including myself has casted a vote… now which one will be picked?

The players, audience and our eyes all watched the giant monitor.

Naud-san continued.

[The rule with the most votes will be used! Now what rule will everyone here have chosen? It’s getting exciting!]

The names of the rules are randomly flashing before our eyes and finally one was chosen.

[The results are in!]

The rule that was chosen was … [Lightning Pace]!

Seeing the result, Naud-san got excited while the audiences cheered loudly!

[Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhh, I can’t believe it! I-It’s been decided! The format that everyone has voted on is… [Lightning Pace]! A rule famous for its short blitz fights!]

……!

Out of all rules in the Rating game, this one has the smallest area as well as the lowest time limit! That’s why matches like these usually involve blitz style fights!

“… Looks like everyone wants to see these two facing off head to head instead of using tactics.”

Ravel spoke.

…. I understand that feeling! Even I had to choose between this and the normal rule, and ended up picking the normal rule in the end. As a [King] I wanted to see how these two teams will move around the arena! But personally, I really want to watch the [Lightning Pace] match!

The mood inside the arena rose up dramatically. Within those moments, Cao Cao stepped forward and initiated a conversation with Sairaorg.

[Sairaorg Bael. I’ve got an offer for you.]

The cameras all focused on Cao Cao now.

While making a confident smile, Cao Cao continued.

[Whatever happens in this match, there are things you and I must do. I will strive forward towards victory and…]

Even while Cao Cao and Sairaorg-san walked towards each other, Cao Cao didn’t stop speaking.

[… I will wait for you at the centre of the field. You know what that means right?]

Both teams were surprised at his proclamation.

That’s to be expected… that announcement was…!

With such a confident smile on his face, Sairaorg-san asked.

[Are you perhaps suggesting a 1-on-1 duel between the [King]s?]

[That is what you want also, right? Of course, I’m including your Longinus.]

……!!!! I, no everyone in this room right now all froze at what we’ve just witnessed!

Even when we were all anxiously watching, Naud-san continued to shout into this microphone.

[Such a provocative statement! Cao Cao has just offered a duel against Sairaorg-san in a fair and square fight!!!!!!]

After sending his challenge, Cao Cao added.

[You might be suspicious when it comes to my offer of a 1-on-1 battle. Well I am a brutal villain after all… I am pretty not trustworthy… However, I swear on a person that I am looking forward to our duel.]

Once again, Sairaorg-san returned with a question.

[Swear upon? To whom I wonder? To Indra whom you serve? Or your ancestor that you proclaim you're from?]

Cao Cao answered his questions straight away. The camera was focusing on his face the entire time.

[… I swear upon the name of Hyoudou Issei.]

"""….!!"""

When he said that, everyone currently here were all astounded!

… I also couldn't help but to stand up at his words!

….. That bastard…!!! You're swearing on my behalf…! I… can't even be angry at that! My rival is currently swearing on my behalf to have a fair fight! My chest is just burning up with emotions right now!

Hearing Cao Cao's words, an unbelievable amount of fighting aura came off from Sairaorg-san.

Seeing that, Cao Cao asked in delight.

[Can't you believe me still?]

Between these two… the strength of their auras colliding could be felt over the monitor. It's as if the space itself is about to collapse.

While returning to his team, Sairaorg-san spoke.

[No, since his name is uttered, there's no reason to not… I will defeat you at the centre of the field!!!]

Those two are having a conversation that's making even me fired up…!

Seeing what happened in front of him, Saji said in a slightly rough voice.

“Sairaorg-sama will not trust Cao Cao at all, and Cao Cao also will think of Sairaorg-sama as someone that he must defeat one day. But Hyoudou.”

Rias continued from Saji.

“For the two of them there, Ise.. the pledge in which they have done in your name is that important.”

And thus, began the fight between the Team Imperial Purpure Sairaorg-san and Spear of the Heavenly Emperor Cao Cao.

Team Members

Team Imperial Purpure Registered Members.

[King] - Sairaorg Bael

[Queen] - Kuisha Abaddon

[Rook] - Sectaas Barbatos (Magdaran Bael’s [Queen])

[Rook] - Ladora Buné

[Knight] - Beruka Furcas

[Knight] - Liban Crocell

[Bishop] - Misteeta Sabnock

[Bishop] - Veves Furfur (Magdaran Bael’s [Bishop])

[Pawn (5)] - Regulus

[Pawn (2)] - Gandoma Balam (Previously [Rook])

Substitute: [Bishop] - Coriana Andrealphus (Substitute player against Cao Cao’s team.)

Team Spear of Heavenly Emperor Registered Members.

[King] - Cao Cao

[Queen] – Guan Gong (God-tier class)

[Rook] - Hercules

[Rook] – Connla (User of Sacred Gear [Night Reflection])

[Knight] - Jeanne

[Knight] - Perseus

[Bishop] - Georg

[Bishop] - Marsilio (User of Sacred Gear [Dreamlike Curse])

[Pawn] X 8 – 8 Former members of Hero Faction.

Team Imperial Purpure is centred around the peerage of Sairaorg Bael and the peerage of his younger brother, Magdaran Bael, who are currently acting as sub-members. They exchange members depending on the situation at hand.

The [Pawn] of Team Imperial Purpure, Regulus, is irregular being known as a Longinus itself. Therefore, there is no accurate measure of its worth of Evil Pieces, and the current value is given as an estimate after careful consideration of events up until now.

Including their [[King] Cao Cao, the members of the Team Spear of Heavenly Emperor have been registered using their aliases but not their true names.

Power MAX vs Technic MAX The Lion King's Iron Fist and the Hero's Holy Spear

Part 1

It’s the beginning of the battle between [Team Imperial Purpure] and [Team Spear of Heavenly Emperor]!

The game field looks like it’s imitating one of the Underworld’s ruins as it was in the middle of the desert.

The area looked like similar in size compared to Khou Academy and since there were no buildings to hide, enemies will be able to meet each other quickly and the battle will begin not long after the match begins.

Now that I think about it, that match that we had against Raiser is almost like [Lightning Fast] since the fighting began as soon as the match had started and the result was concluded quickly.

[THE TIME LIMIT OF THIS LIGHTNING FAST MATCH IS ONLY AN HOUR!]

Just as Naud-san said, the time limit for this game is very short for a Rating Game. There were times when people fought for an entire day and night.

Naud-san continued his explanation.

[The victor is either the one who topples the other’s [King] first or the team who has managed to defeat the most amount of enemy in terms of piece value if both [King]s remain undefeated by the end of the game!]

It’s such a simple rule. In the case where both [King]s survives until the end, the victory is decided upon who has

earned more points by taking down the opponent’s players.

In the case of where one team is lacking members and therefore has disadvantages, there are rules in place which levels the playing field for them.

The monitors in the control centre show the movements of both teams, and as soon as the teams have identified the map of the field, both teams made their moves.

The [King]s of both teams, Sairaorg-san and Cao Cao both gave orders to their team and headed towards the middle of the field.

Soon the caster Naud-san started to shout-cast the battle.

[Ohh! Looks like a battle has already started at the north side of the field!]

When we shifted our attention to the monitor that showed the fight… we saw [Team Imperial Purpure]’s Pale Horse riding [Knight] Beruka Furcas-san was facing against [Team Spear of Heavenly Emperor]’s brown haired [Knight] Perseus.

Perseus of Cao Cao’s team was a member who wasn’t present during that time we faced the Hero Faction, and he showed himself for the first time during this event. They said that he was an ex-member of the Hero Faction, and also joined up with Cao Cao once more because of this event…

[I am the [Knight] of Sairaorg Bael’s peerage Beruka Furcas! I’m looking forward to a fair fight!]

Just like when he fought Kiba before, Beruka-san charged head-on wielding his lance! Just what I expected from

Sairaorg-san’s [Knight]!

His opponent Perseus also looked very knight-like wielding a round shield and a long sword!

[I am the Great Perseus! I do enjoy a fair fight!]

Saying that he blocked Beruka-san’s jousting and aimed his long sword towards the rider, but the Pale Horse backed off as if to say he’s not letting Perseus take his owner out like that easily.

The First battle is getting so heated up that the crowds couldn’t’ help but get excited!

Understanding Beruka-san’s ability from that encounter, Perseus changed his expression to a serious one.

[Not too bad, Great King’s [Knight]. Not too bad at all. This is it. This was what I was looking for!]

Perseus then… tossed his round shield away! And his left hand, instead of the shield…. An aura was forming something!

I’ve seen this from previous records! This is his Sacred Gear!

It was… a giant shield with a face of a human etched into its front!

That face was… a face of a woman with the hair of a snake… a female demon so famous even I know of… Medusa!

Perseus shouted.

[Rise, my Sacred Gear! The royal command of execution by the Queen of Snakes! [Aegis Mineralization]!]

As soon as he’s finished, the face etched onto the shield… Medusa’s eye opened! Beruka-san has managed to dodge the attack before Medusa’s eyes fully opened so he survived, but if anyone was hit by that terrifying Sacred Gear, they would have turned into stone instantly. If anyone who’s weaker than Perseus gets hit by that beam then they would instantly be petrified.

Kiba, who was watching this match with me, said.

“Perseus is a unique guy, who uses his Sacred Gear which can be related back from his origin of the hero [Perseus]. Anyhow, being hit by that beam is dangerous.”

It’s good that Beruka-san is the agility type, if he wasn’t able to move around that quickly he would have turned into stone by now…

Apart from these two, the fights were happening all over the field now.

On the south part of the field, the thick fog was covering the surrounding area. It must be the works of the Hero Faction’s Georg… that fog has the ability to block attacks and confuse the enemies.

So that guy came back from Hell then. I heard that he, Cao Cao and that [Annihilation Maker] kid was sent to the Hell by Indra…

Is that kid not part of the main team because he’s currently acting as a stand-in? Actually, thinking about it, it’ll be hard for someone who caused that big of an incident to

participate in the tournament. He might not even participate in the tournament at all this time.

… Just then something happened on the monitor showing Regulus and Sairaorg-san.

When Sairaorg-san group was nearing the ruins in the middle of the field… a huge man stepped in front, blocking his paths.

When that person showed himself, Sairaog-san’s expression brightened.

[Ah, so the first person to block my path is… you.]

[Heh, it’s been awhile.]

That person was… Hercules!

I didn’t see it personally but I heard that these two fought during the monster incident in Lilith!

[N-N-No wayyyyyyy! The person that Sairaorg-sama has encountered is Herculeeeees!!! Hercules, who has had a past feud with Sairaorg-sama has blocked his paths before he reached Cao Cao!!!]

Even Naud-san was shouting into his microphone.

Many people know that it was Sairaog-san who apprehended Hercules during the Monster incident. So, to many people, the fight between these two people are like fate itself.

Hercules scratched his cheek.

[I still remember that punch I took from you clearly. It was a class of pain that’s beyond comprehension.]

Hercules took his top off and showed off his toned body.

[I, who have never felt fear until that time, have experienced shiver for the first time in my life.]

With bulky muscles and veins popping all over his arm, Hercules narrowed his eyes and said.

[I was scared… and so angry at the same time… I had those weak feelings inside me bolted up until now. Hehe, I’m like a girl, aren’t I?]

Hercules then took his fighting stance.

[… so that’s why… let me redeem myself here.]

After finishing his sentence, Hercules leapt towards Sairaorg-san with such speed that was not expected from his build. Sairaorg-san reacted to Hercules’ movement instantly and fought against him.

As soon as Hercules’s punch hit Sairaorg-san’s face… there was an enormous explosion! So that is his sacred gear!

But Sairaorg-san neither stumbled, nor backed off. Using the smoke created from the explosion, he ran through the smoke and landed a punch filled with his aura on Hercules’s face!

Just like that, those two started to punch each other in their faces! Such power from both of them!

Both Sairaorg-san and Hercules suffered nose bleed but looks like they were fine apart from that.

I’m sure Sairaorg-san hasn’t used all his strength yet, but even so, that Hercules is quite impressive with only a nose bleed from Sairaorg-san’s attack.

“… Hercules’s defence has gotten so much better than before. He took quite a lot of damage from the same punch before.”

Kiba spoke, and since Kiba saw the fight between these two before, he was able to tell instantly how much they have changed… Hercules also seemed to gain a lot more strength.

Hercules stretched his neck and spoke.

[Pah, I should tell you this… I’m not here on my leader’s order. I’m here on my own accord.]

[That may be so. But if it’s that guy, wouldn’t he have guessed that you would do such a thing?]

When Sairaorg-san countered, Hercules made a bitter smile.

[… that guy, his brain works in such an unusual way.]

Instead of being bothered by Hercules’s action, Sairaorg-san was, in fact, enjoying his encounter.

Sairaorg-san then asked Regulus.

[… Let’s go, Regulus. Looks like I won’t be able to win without your help.]

[Understood!]

A masked young boy then turned into a giant lion and jumped towards Sairaorg-san! When those two collided… a bright aura has gotten stronger and engulfed the surroundings!

[[[Balance Break!!!]]]

The person who emerged after that shout was Sairaorg-san wearing his lion armour!... It was a scenery befitting of the Heir of the Great King known as King of Lion.

[LIIIIIIOOOOON-SAAAAAAN!!!!]

[FIIIIIIGHTING!!!]

When Sairaorg-san wore his lion armour, every child in the arena started to cheer for him.

Then suddenly, Sairaorg-san, who was standing there with his immense aura emitting off from his body, just vanished!

Hercules was… looks like he was able to chase after Sairaorg-san with his eyes, he managed to dodge his attacks by an inch every time. But because of the immense power of Sairaorg-san’s punch, the pressure waves left bruises around Hercules’s body.

Even if you’re not hit by the punch, the pressure waves from them alone will eat away your stamina. Even though Hercules couldn’t even back off from the fight… he had such joyful expression along all that time.

[So finally, I am fighting against you and your armour! Before, I was knocked down by you without your armour like an idiot!]

When Hercules said that, Sairaorg-san spoke even while keep sending his punch and kicks.

[I've trained constantly after that incident but looks like you also trained during that time, perhaps even more so than I have!]

While delicately moving his body here and there, Hercules dodged getting hit by Sairaorg-san's punch directly. But his body soon became tattered with injuries due to the pressure waves.

Hercules's attack and explosions hit Sairaorg-san time and time again but… that didn't cause much damage to him and the armour was even scratched from it.

Finally, when Sairaorg-san's punch hit Hercules's abdomen, his body bent 90 degrees forward. Sairaorg-san then kneed Hercules's pained expressed face without any mercy.

Hercules, who got kicked in his chin was not engulfed in Retire light, but he fell on the floor instantly…

[DOOOOOOOWN!!! Hercules could not survive the last attack and is now down!!]

The commentator also shouted in excitement.

Shiva then explained after the fact.

[Now it's a real battle from here now. If he has really inherited the soul of the hero then he will stand up from this. If he doesn't, then he becomes just a fake.]

When Shiva said something incredibly harsh…

Hercules didn’t seem like he’ll stand up any time soon, but then some changes happened amongst the crowd.

[Ojjjjiiii-san!]

On the corner of the stadium, a few kindergarten boys stood up from their seats.

[Hercules-ojii-san! Fighting!]

[Stand up!]

That was… the voice of the kids who were supporting Hercules.

… I knew that Hercules was protecting a kindergarten in Lilith but… maybe they are from that kindergarten?

As if he had heard the kid’s voice from the video feed showing the crowds in the sky, Hercules slowly pulled his body up!

Hercules wiped off the blood next to his mouth and made a bitter smile while catching his breath.

[….. I-I-I told you, guy… not to call me ‘ojii-san’….]

Hercules groaned.

After catching his breath and wiping his nose bleed, Hercules spoke with a confident smile.

[I’ll show you my trump card.]

Saying that Hercules took something out from his body.

That was… a few trading cards. The card shown on the monitor was a scene from [Oppai Dragon] show.

Hercules showed that to Sairaorg-san.

[This is quite a rare card… and this one is rarer, these are all the things those brats gave me… something like a charm. They told me that these let you boost your power by multiple times like [Oppai Dragon]. Haaaaaa, they probably got this after asking their parents over and over again, and then they ended up giving it to someone like me.]

Muttering grumpily, Hercules put those cards inside his pocket again.

Then striking a stance, that giant pulled his aura up… When Hercules charged such an amount of aura not even comparable to what was before, I held my breath.

[Those brats who gave me those cards are watching this right now… now my power must increase multiple times just like [Oppai Dragon]!]

Of course, there won’t be any of those powers in those cards but… I was moved by his words.

… If those kids gave him those cards, then, of course, he will be able to pull strength from deep inside himself from them!

From the tip of Hercules’s hands, a violent wave gushed out.

Looking at that, Sairaorg-san smiled.

[Oh ho, so those cards allow you to send off your strongest attack.]

Instead of dismissing Hercules’s words, Sairaorg-san was taking in every word he said seriously.

[….Not only that…!! I’m so angry..!! there are… there are people who are spouting nonsense that you’re a fake!!]

Hercules shouted with all his might.

[I really wish that they were hit by that fist of yours!!! There’s no way that a brute who only knows how to throw a punch will have a cunning brain to use something like a power-up item!!]

And then with speed not seen from him before, Hercules charged towards Sairaorg-san and sent a punch with all his might.

Sairaorg-san tried to bounce the attack too but, a loud noise was followed by a gigantic explosion! We could see that there was blood on Sairaorg-sans’s left hand!

Hercules’s attack penetrated Sairaorg-san’s armour and caused damage to his body!

Not only that, with Hercules’s constant barrage, Sairaorg-sans armour started to crack! Even when there wasn’t even a scratch just before!

Hercules roared.

[I’ve gone and tear apart that Balance Breaker stuff and fixed it from the beginning! I’ve given up on those missile attack! I’ve changed it to those which concentrate the destruction onto a single point!!]

Hercules destroyed the right shoulder armour with a punch followed by an explosion.

[I can make my attack sharper like this!!!]

That Hercules, he tore apart his Balance Breaker and changed it so that he can [Concentrate the Power of Destruction] with his power!

Even though his armour is getting destroyed, and blood is spouting out from his body, Sairaorg-san ignored all those and continued to send punches and kicks towards Hercules again and again!

In the end, after accumulating enough stress and damage from the fight, Hercules stood there catching his breath.

[…. That still hurt, your punch…]

Even though his face was all swollen, Hercules smiled as if he was happy.

It looks like he’s really enjoying having this one on one battle against Sairaorg-san.

And finally, after blocking Hercules’ final attack, Sairaorg-san pinned a well-aimed punch filled with his power straight into Hercules’s face.

A clear sound rang around the arena. One that everyone could tell that it was the final attack of this match.

Sairaorg-san then said to the falling Hercules.

[Thank you, the one who has inherited the spirit of the Hero Hercules. I will take pride in fighting again you.]

Hercules, who has fallen, also said to Sairaorg-san in a proud voice.

[… Hm, I didn’t do anything to deserve such praise…]

Hercules then was engulfed in the Retire light.

[[Team Spear of Heavenly Emperor]’s [Rook] has retired…]

However, the match still continued after.

Since it was a rapid match, the retirement announcement came in one after another.

[[Team Imperial Purpure]’s one [Bishop] has retired.]

[[Team Spear of Heavenly Emperor]’s two [Pawn]s has retired.]

[Team Imperial Purpure]’s one [Knight] has retired.]

[Team Spear of Heavenly Emperor]’s three [Pawn]s has retired.]

Battles have commenced all over the small arena, and members of both teams reduced.

[Ku! They’re sucking the fog away?! I even put new magic into this one!]

Georg tried to create a barrier using his fog, but Sairaorg-san’s [Queen], Kuisha-san, used the House of Abaddon’s special ability [Hole] to suck those fogs away.

[I can at least do this much, I am the House of Bael’s [Queen] after all.]

… just then!

[That is interesting!]

A giant riding a huge red horse came running over and tried to slash Kuisha-san with his Green Dragon Crescent Blade, but Kuisha-san dodged the attack by hiding in her own hole. Appearing somewhere using her ability, she created even more [Hole]s and while not taking even a single step backwards, she started to fight against Georg and Guan-gong. She has become much stronger than when we fought against each other.

But even so, facing against both Georg and Guan-gong is too much. It could be that she’s trying to survive until the short time limit ends…

Just then, another member of the [Team Imperial Purpure] has joined the fray and the fight just got a lot more intense.

Even amongst all that, two people faced off each other in the middle of the field.

Cao Cao, who arrived at the centre first, tapped his shoulder with his holy spear while making a smile and he greeted Sairaorg-san who is covered in his armour.

[Looks like we’ve met at the centre as promised. I did want to fight with the Lion King at his full strength but… Hercules wanted to test his own resolve it seems.]

When Cao Cao said that, Sairaorg-san just shook his head.

[No, it’s fine. In fact, I’m grateful… thanks to the fight against that man, I’m readier than ever.]

As if to prove his words, aura seeped off all over from Sairaorg-san’s injured body.

Looking at that aura, Cao Cao smiled as if he’s enjoying this.

[… Yes, I know. you and Hyoudou Issei are the same… I mean, this could be your best condition, right?]

Cao Cao continued while twirling his spear.

[I’ve already thought of a countless number of strategies to win against you without fighting straight on. Even with hundreds of scenarios of winning as well, I binned all of those ideas. Can you guess why?]

Cao Cao pointed his spear towards Sairaorg-san.

[That’s because whatever method I can think of, compared to the idea of fighting the Lion King one-on-one, they are all worthless.]

While making casual conversations, the match has silently begun. Cao Cao shortened the distance in an instant and quickly sent several jabs towards Sairaorg-san. Meanwhile, Sairaorg-san dodged all of those attacks by only moving his torso, and tried to penetrate Cao Cao’s defence, but Cao Cao sent his body backwards and again, quickly distanced himself.

Noticing that Cao Cao has already figured out his attacking range, Sairaorg-san burst out laughing.

[Fufufu, you are a man with interesting ideas.]

[Anyone who has exchanged fists with Hyoudou Issei all long for this kind of situation.]

[Heh, looks like both you and me have gone mad after taking that idiotic man’s incredible attack.]

Cao Cao and Sairaorg-san continued to talk.

Those two were, those two were joyfully talking about a thing only those two could understand, they sent attacks toward each other, and dodged attacks from their opponents.

… I’m thankful that you guys are talking about me, but seriously, I’m on the edge of my seat watching this match!

Attacks from both of them were critical against their opponents. The holy aura from the spear will definitely penetrate the Lion armour and burn Sairaorg-san’s body from the inside.

Cao Cao also has the body of Human, therefore if he gets hit by Sairaorg-san’s attack even once, that’ll cause the critical wound to himself.

… It’s not an exaggeration to say that whoever lands the first strike will be the victor.

Everyone sitting in this room knows that, and the commentators, Naud-san and Shiva both are focusing on who will land the first attack.

Every attack that Cao Cao sends, he pulls up his Holy aura which creates a massive wave that whenever Sairaorg-san

dodge, goes off to some remote part of the map and causes huge destruction.

Sairaorg-san is keeping his distance to dodge even the wave of the Holy Aura, and haven't been hit directly by them yet.

Similarly, Cao Cao, seeing that he knows the range of the pressure wave created by Sairaorg-san's punch, kept his distance while dodging his attacks. Just like Hercules before him, Cao Cao tried to dodge both the pressure wave from the punch and the wave from the aura itself

That Cao Cao, he is perfectly keeping his distance when he's one-eyed…

Those two were having a perfect no-damage, no-guard match.

Watching that, Rias murmured.

"… It's a god-like battle. Those two would only have seen each other's techniques from previous footages only, but in this match, they've managed to successfully dodge all of each other's attacks without getting hit once…"

Sona-senpai also spoke while keeping her eye focused on the monitor.

"Sairaorg must be using all the knowledge and experience he has gained from countless amount of training and real battles while Cao Cao is… using his natural gifted sense. At this point, the match will be decided when one person successfully penetrate other's defences but…"

While everyone was watching, Cao Cao stabbed with his spear while spinning as if he was dancing, and suddenly a

halo appeared behind him.

… He’s activating his Balance Breaker while moving so fluidly like water!!

Instead of taking a flashy stance, Cao Cao activated his balance breaker while attacking his opponent. That skilful execution was so amazing everyone was mesmerised.

As soon as he activated his Balance Breaker, an aura and pressure coming off from Cao Cao have risen significantly and the speed of his spear and holy aura also increased abnormally with it.

At that moment, the Holy Aura reached an area that Sairaorg-san has not predicted. Sairaorg-san couldn’t dodge the attack beforehand and his Lion Armour ended up taking significant amounts of damage.

There was smoke coming off from his body underneath the armour. There was no change in Sairaorg-san’s expression, but that must be followed by extreme pain. For a devil, Holy Aura is critical, and in the presence of the aura, his stamina will be greatly cut.

Cao Cao, after equipping his Balance Breaker didn’t equip his orbs but…

[I’m not going to take out my Seven Treasures this time since I’m thinking of concentrating all that energy into the spear instead. I’ve come to the conclusion that for types like you and Hyoudou Issei, instead of using special moves, beating you with simple techniques seems to be the best solution.]

The aura from the spear has… risen up by orders of magnitude. To a point where we could also feel it over the monitor. That aura must be penetrating the armour and burning Sairaorg-san right now.

So, he’s able to create such terrifying aura just by concentrating all the Holy Aura into his spear instead of calling those orbs. A devil will surely retire if they get hit by such aura directly, but other species won’t survive without any harm as well.

Taking a deep sigh, Sairaorg-san shouted.

[Regulus!! Release!!]

[Understood!!]

With the shout…a golden and purple aura seeped out of all over Sairaorg-san’s body!

Sairaorg-san, and also the lion mark on his chest plate started to chant.

[…This body, this soul, even if it falls into an endless ravine!]

[My Lord and I, we will exhaust this body and this soul to rise up the endless royal road!]

The Lion King armour changed to a magnificent and offensive form!

[Raze, triumph, play, and shine!]

[This is the body of a Demonic Beast!]

[Lodged on top of my fist, is the glorious imperial authority!]

The surrounding was destroyed from all the aura and pressure, the ground Sairaorg-san was standing on also turned into a huge pit!

The earth shattered, air vibrated and even the image from the monitor shook. The impact wave was so big it could even shake the entire field!

And Sairaorg-san and Regulus shouted the last verse together!

[[[Breakdown The Beast, Climb Over!]]]

A huge explosion of aura followed, then Sairaorg-san in his purple and golden armour, surrounded by an overwhelming aura, appeared.

This was the rumoured Breakdown The Beast!! Seeing that form, it was both an honour to see something I've only heard from rumour, but also can't help but be terrified at the same time!

Every time Sairaorg-san took a step, the earth beneath him shattered and interference formed on the monitor.

However, from Sairaorg-san's mouth… blood was coming out.

So, it does give so much stress to the wearer! He's taken damage even before the fight has started!

[Here I come.]

Sairaorg-san disappeared without making any noise. It was such a speed that the ground he stood on was dug in and made into a pit. However, Cao Cao reacted through both his vision and his sense and instantly dodged the punch from Sairaorg-san who appeared behind him!... but looking like he has misjudged the distance, blood came out from his nose! The aura from the punch has given him some damage!

That aura Cao Cao has just dodged opened the ground below and reached to the edge of the horizon of the field. Even I won't be able to survive if I got hit by such an attack! It's enough power to destroy the field with a single punch!

Looking at that, Ddraig said.

{Yes, that punch is equivalent to the Crimson Blaster that Partner, you, blast. If not more.}

So that means that I won't be able to face off against Sairaorg-san's Breakdown The Beast with my Cardinal Crimson Promotion. <Need to check with Zx>

I probably can't avoid using Diabolos Dragon God if I end up facing him now…

In terrifying speed, Sairaorg-san sent punches and kicks toward Cao Cao. Every time he does that, the field itself deformed like it was screaming in pain, the shock of entire earth beneath was seen from the monitor.

It was an attack that strong. But those attacks were…

[They aren't landing! Those attacks are not landing at all! The intense attacks from Sairaorg-sama do not even scratch

Cao Cao! Cao Cao is even dodging the aura coming from the punches as well!!!]

Just as Naud-san was saying, Sairaorg-san's attack couldn't cause critical damage to Cao Cao!!!

That bastard…!! I can't believe it! Sairaorg-san is currently moving faster than Kiba, the speed that even I can't match unless I activate Dragon God!

But Cao Cao is denying such attack perfectly, toying with him!!

Ravel said.

"… Even a single hit would mean Sairaorg-sama's victory, it's that powerful of an attack. If Sairaorg-sama's opponent was Ise-sama then it would become a match of fist fight where each other will land a hit on their opponents every time. But the owner of the [Holy Spear] is… dodging them like it's nothing."

Bina-san, my quiet [Queen] also spoke for the first time.

"Power, defence, speed. Sairaorg is above him. But with only his sense, Cao Cao is managing to dodge all of that… Using the talent given to him by the heaven, he's facing off against Sairaorg Bael."

… this is the talent of the genius.

Even if he wields the most powerful Longinus, Cao Cao is a human. His physical ability may be greater than those of average human but his body is still one of that of a human.

… But even so, Sairaorg-san’s [Breakdown The Beast] doesn’t work on him…!!!

Sairaorg-san’s face winced every time he threw a punch. His [Breakdown The Beast] was giving him that much strain on his body.

And then, a change occurred during that fight.

Cao Cao was now sending jab and slash while he was dodging his opponent’s attack. At first, he only sent a single attack between his dodge, but soon he was able to send two or three attacks, he was able to jab Sairaorg-san’s shoulder as a horrid counter to Sairargo-san’s punch.

[!!]

Getting hit by that attack, Sairaorg-san groaned in pain.

His armour was destroyed, and blood was pouring out from his shoulder while smoke coming from the wound due to Holy Aura intensified.

Cold sweat started to drip from his face.

And without any concern, Cao Cao continued to send jabs with his spear! It was now Sairaorg-san’s turn to dodge the attacks. Cao Cao started his counter against Sairaorg-san by sending attacks to where he predicts Sairaorg-san will go.

Sairaorg-san’s armour started to break into pieces one by one, and soon his Imperial Purpure armour was destroyed.

At the same time, the number of injuries on his body increased. Damages done by the aura accumulated and he ended up coughing out a huge amount of blood.

That must be because of both [Breakdown The Beast] and the holy aura.

Looking at the scene, Saji… scrawled his face.

“… is this… even possible?! All that effort, and yet he couldn’t land a single hit but now he’s getting hit by the enemy’s attack instead!”

… same thoughts here, Saji.

I know how much Sairaorg-san worked. No, Sairaorg-san must have pushed his body beyond that.

Even so… even so…!

… so, you can’t beat a natural genius.

Sairaorg-san’s armour broke down even further, and even when he fixed it with his aura it was soon gone again. The body, now emitting thick smoke everywhere, was also covered in blood. His breathing got rougher as well and he couldn’t even take a breath easily.

His punches became less sharp than before to a point where Cao Cao was able to dodge it easily now.

In a positive way, he was able to prevent Cao Cao from getting closer by emitting aura from his body, but even that’s a matter of time before aura is penetrated.

Once that aura has gone weak enough, Cao Cao’s single jab will end the fight.

Even so, Sairaorg-san, instead of even thinking about kneeling down at all, his attacks got even bolder, never letting go of the rhythms of his attack.

Then it happened when I began to think of the scenario where Sairaorg-san might lose…

There was a chance where… Sairaorg-san's attack nearly landed.

I thought I saw it wrong but… a few seconds later his attack nearly hit Cao Cao once more.

Everyone here also noticed that. And when we focused to see what was happening…

There was cold sweat forming on Cao Cao's face.

His berating was also irregular, it was obvious that he was getting tired!

Even at that moment, Sairaorg-san ran towards him with his full might and sent an attack toward him.

Cao Cao dodged that attack but… he nearly was tripped over and nearly got kicked by Sairaorg-san's well-timed kick. Cao Cao somehow dodged that attack also but… he was out of breath soon after.

"He has begun to catch up to Cao Cao's speed!"

Being excited, Xenovia stood up and pointed at the monitor.

Rias also couldn't take her eyes off the monitor.

“Stamina… in terms of physical strength Sairaorg is leagues above Cao Cao.”

Stamina… Physical strength…

Just then, I remembered something.

… Physical training… this is something you need to do regularly. That’s why this is one of the training that I trust the most. …

He ran and ran day after day… and even the morning after getting all those criticisms he builds his strength through running…

… even when he loses and fall many times, he trained that body of his.

… thinking to himself that he’ll win next time, to move forward.

… that he can reach somewhere with this fist, training all day and night.

I stood up, and erupting all those feelings that I had in my heart through my tears, I shouted to the top of my lungs.

“Win… Win, Sairaorg-san…!”

Even Saji stood up and shouted.

“Wiiiiiiiiiiiiin! My lord, you must win!!!!”

Sairaorg-san’s punches slowly inched closer toward Cao Cao.

Out of breath, Cao Cao tried to slow down the attacks with his spear but, Sairaorg-san managed to punch the spear away.

Even then, Cao Cao was a genius. Spinning his body around, he stabbed Sairaorg-san’s side. The expression of Sairaorg-san changed to those of pain, and his stomach where fresh blood was pouring out also emitted huge amounts of smokes.

… but just then, Cao Cao’s legs trembled. Because he has wasted more energy than he thought he needs while approaching Sairaorg-san, Cao Cao’s stance was disrupted. He has regained his composure again soon, but Sairaorg-san didn’t let go of this chance. He sent a reverse knuckle punch towards Cao Cao’s face.

Taking his spear back, Cao Cao… just barely dodged that one too.

But barely… doesn’t cut it. He wasn’t able to dodge the attack from the aura!

When the aura landed on Cao Cao, blood shot out from his nose and Cao Cao’s legs once again trembled. Looks like he has received a slight concussion.

Sairaorg-san was waiting for this moment.

Just one hit.

If he lands one hit…….

Sairaorg-san then sent his fist towards Cao Cao who was trembling on a spot with blood all over his body…

When I saw that attack, I couldn’t stop crying.

Just like that, Cao Cao was sent flying across the field. He tumbles along the ground several times and then….. he just stopped moving.

A silence fell across the map. Everyone watching silently stood up from watching the fight.

And then……

[DOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOWN!!! Cao Cao is down!!!!!]

Naud-san shouted into his microphone!

[WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!]

Even the audiences were making the loudest noise that we’ve heard so far today!

It hit…

It hit, it hit IT HIT!!!

Saji was now crying manly tears, covering his eyes with his hands. He was shedding tears of joy.

Regardless of how much damage he’s taken since he landed that hit…

Just then, Bina-san spoke with a cold voice.

“It’s not over yet.”

Hearing that, everyone turned their focus back to the monitor.

[… Fufufu]

Small laughter was heard from the fallen Cao Cao.

Staggering up from the ground, he wiped the blood off from his mouth.

His body was shaking, and his legs that were supporting his body was also trembling. It looks like he’s taken quite a lot of damage but, to stand up after getting hit by that punch!

When we were all confused about what happened, Bina-san said.

“… just before getting hit, he used his spear as a shield and avoided getting hit directly.”

….!! N-No way! Just like back in Kyoto when I used [Welsh Dragonic Rook], to use his spear as a shield…

Spitting out blood from his mouth, Cao Cao began talking.

[… legendary weapon, Longinus, holy spear, holy relic… that was a punch that made it feel like those were all worthless.]

Looking at the sky, he continued.

[…… to devils of all classes, and those of ancient devils… watch closely. The one who is currently cornering the holy spear, the being that you were scared of… is strength perfected from continuous training that you’ve been denying for past thousands, tens of thousands of years…

Understand that there are limits that you cannot reach on your vein arguments alone, and watch the fight between my Holy Spear and the heir of the Great King until the very end!]

……

… not only I but both Rias and Sona-senpai both were surprised at Cao Cao’s proclaim just now.

Sairaorg-san also asked curiously.

[Why did you make such a claim?]

Looking at Sairaorg-san confidently, Cao Cao said.

[… I don’t like that the person that forced me into the corner, you or Sekiryuutei, is being looked down upon because of unnecessary suspicion or useless pride. Since both you or Sekiryuutei are my arch rival.]

……

… I don’t know if he knows what kind of situation Sairaorg-san is currently in but…

No, it’s because he knows the situation that he’s mentioned that. Never have I thought Cao Cao would say such things……

When I was thinking that, something changed in the live commentary booth.

Looking at the monitor we saw that there was a camera installed in the middle of the booth, and in front of that

camera was… someone familiar from the television before.

A devil that looks similar to Sairaorg-san… his little brother Magdaran Bael-san.

Magdaran -san grabbed the mic in the commentary booth and addressed to everyone at the arena.

[Heir of the Great King Sairaorg-san is… only fighting with his physical strength only. That’s because he has not inherited one of the most valuable powers of the Great King family, the power of destruction… compared to previous Great King, he will wield less political power. Even incidents that happen within the land of the House, instead of sorting it out by formally sending out delegation, he goes to the incident himself. Seriously, he lacks any common sense.]

Reacting to the voice of Magdaran -san talking about his older brother, everyone in the arena lend him their ears.

[Even putting on a costume and going to sell our area’s speciality, he does all sort of things that nobles really don’t do. And for any requests from the citizens, even if they are the tantrums of a child, he will listen to them all and try his best to fulfil their wishes. He truly tries his best at everything.] Looking at his brother on the monitor, Magdaran -san shed a tear.

[Even still, I will follow my big brother without doubting him … Sairaorg Bael is the true heir of the Great King, the true Great King Bael…!!]

Once he finished, someone started to clap somewhere from the audience. That sound became louder and louder and soon filled the entire arena.

… but the voice of criticisms was also heard.

But there were people who acknowledged Sairaorg-san, both his ally and the enemy has acknowledged that Sairaorg-san is truly powerful.

Just then, the cast commentator Shiva jeered.

[That was a cool speech. Yes, the king of the devil would have been obsessed with destruction or a thing like his bloodline. Well, I'm not the one who can comment on the costumes of Devils, but I can easily define what a Hero is… it's ones who is wanted by everyone, and ones whose name that everyone wants to remember.]

[Not only that, but physical strength is also a genuine and proper form of destruction. especially those fists that are the result of countless training. They aren't something we can be found easily. It's the word from me, god of destruction, so you can take my word for it. if someone doubts his power seeing that power, then it's simply out of jealousy.]

It was like he said those comments to suppress the hatred towards Sairaorg-san that was going around the underworld.

… for that God of Destruction, the power of destruction, or physical strength. In terms of the ability to destroy objects, they may look the same. In the end, both of them are the power that can [Destroy] …

There's no knowing if what Magdaran -san and Shiva has said reached to the field.

But even so, this intense fight between Sairaorg-san and Cao Cao has once again, begin. The fight between the fist and Spear's [No Guard] was once again, in a full swing!

Dodging and punching, Sairaorg-san spoke

[… you sure are a strange man…. But I like it!]

Jabbing his spear and dodging a kick, Cao Cao replied.

[You’re someone worth taking down!!]

I’m the one who’ll be the victor!!

What began right now was the collision of each other’s will. Since they were at their maximum power, moving around itself took stamina and on top of that, the fight became one where nobody’s attack landed on their opponent. Even then, both players smiled while fighting each other.

Lose when someone gets hit, win when you hit. This wasn’t a fight that you can easily observe anywhere.

A fight that can only be enjoyed at this moment, both of them are truly enjoying their time.

While the fight was happening, Sairaorg-san’s armour is destroyed completely and…

[[Team Imperial Purpure]’s Pawn, retire!]

Finally, Regulus retired! Due to loss of strength during the Breakdown the Beast] and damage from the spear, Regulus retired first.

After having been stripped from his armour, Sairaorg-san lessened the distance between himself and Cao Cao in his bare body!

Cao Cao also seems like he lacks any sort of strength to maintain his Balance Breaker, he too was fighting in his original state.

They were out of breath and sweats were pouring and blood was gushing out but even then, both of them were still deploying a ridiculous defence and attack and were at each other's throats.

Finally, the time limit caught up to them.

[…TIME OVER!! The match has finished! And the victor is…]

Since the time limit has been reached, the team who took the most amounts of points by taking down the members of the other team will win! With both [King]s alive, I wonder who gained the most points…

Referee's voice rang throughout the arena.

[… [Team Spear of Heavenly Emperor] Cao Cao's team won!!!!]

…….!

Looking at the scoreboard, [Team Imperial Purpure] had 19, [Team Spear of Heavenly Emperor] had a total of 25 points. Cao Cao's team definitely had won more points.

…. So it was a fight between their peerage that decided the match… well since Guan-Gong was here… it's frustrating but this is the rule of the rating game after all.

…. Sairarog-san's team has lost…

Once the victor was announced, the shoulder of Sairaorg-san continued to lift up and down while he was breathing roughly. All the stress from the fight has finally caught up to him.

[… So I've lost.]

Sairaorg-san walked towards Cao Cao.

[… no, if we continued to fight… well maybe it's improper to say such thing now?]

[Yes, in the end, the result is what matters the most. Well, I'm satisfied… there will be more opportunity for fights, right?]

When Cao Cao staggered, Sairaorg-san supported him.

The two of them walked towards the teleportation circle.

[… I wonder what rule there will be next time we fight?]

[Hmm, it'll be fun to fight you amongst all the complicated rules next time.]

[Yes, I'm sure. Well that's that, seriously, whenever I fight you or Hyoudou Issei, it's as if I can feel my life being drained from my body.]

[Can't helps it. Both I or him have no talent whatever except fighting.]

[I'm now anticipating even more hearing that.]

An amazing fight between two [King]s … through this fight, the bond between the two men deepened.

While everyone in the viewing area was sending applause to both teams, without me noticing, Saji was next to me.

“That was such an amazing fight. Thanks to that, I feel like I’ll be able to fight you as much as I want.”

“… Yeah, let’s have an amazing match like the one we just saw.”

In the corner of the stadium that was covered in such excitement, Saji and I made our intentions clear.

A little while after the end of the match, the team that I, Hyoudou Issei, lead will… fight against the Sitri peerage of Sona Sitri.

[Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] Team VS [Sona Sitri] Team ---Stronger Than That Time, Further Than Now---

Line.1 The Various Differences From Last Year

It’s precisely because we’re in the same generation that I want to be stronger than that guy.

It’s precisely because we’re in the same generation that I’ve always wanted to be stronger than that guy—.

Part 1

A few days had passed since the match between Sairaorg-san’s team and Cao Cao’s team—. Rias, Akeno-san, Ravel and I – just the four of us welcomed a guest to the VIP room on the top floor of the Hyoudou residence. The guest placed a set of Blu-ray discs that they had brought along onto the table.

“This is what I told Rias-san about last time. Having said that, I’m sure all of you have already seen the show.”

The guest who pushed her glasses up after saying that was — Seekvaira Agares-san. Indeed, our visitor was Seekvaira Agares-san (her [Queen] Alivian-san also accompanied her). She expressed an interest in watching those Blu-ray discs with me (and my manager Ravel) as well as Rias and Akeno-san to have a discussion on it. Since our match with the Sitri peerage was quickly approaching, Ravel recommended participating in this discussion since it was related to the Sitri peerage. …Rias had also mentioned the topic before, so she had some knowledge of it, and I wanted to properly ask Rias and Seekvaira-san about some things. Alivian-san received a Blu-ray disc from Seekvaira, and then inserted it into the player which had been set up in the VIP room. Shortly afterwards, the contents of the Blu-ray disc were displayed on the television screen.

[Magical ☆ Levia-tan! It’s starting~!]

There was a familiar figure and a familiar voice — indeed, the live-action special effects show that began to play on the television was from the Underworld and starred Serafall Leviathan — [Magical ☆ Levia-tan]. Seekvaira-san had brought along the latest edition of the show.

[Now, General of the Fallen Angels! I cannot allow you to continue your evil ways!]

Just like always, Magical ☆ Levia-tan fought against enemies on screen in a lively manner. The most popular aspect of this special effects program was the fact that Maou Leviathan-sama herself starred in it…. However, the main character, Leviathan-sama, had entered the Isolation Barrier field in order to defeat Trihexa and this meant that she would have a long absence from the Underworld. It was an undeniable truth that she was no longer with us. Naturally, this meant that she was unable to perform her role in the

special effects program. Of course, we hadn’t received any reports of Leviathan-sama’s return either, yet [Magical ☆ Levia-tan] did not halt its broadcast and new episodes continued to be released! I was also rather surprised when Rias told me of this recently, and after watching the show’s broadcast in the Underworld, I was truly astonished! …In truth, there was a reason for this — there was an undisclosed secret. And I already knew about this secret…. Seekvaira-san placed her hand against her chin as she asked Rias,

“—What do you think of it? About your childhood friend Sona-san pretending to be Levia-tan.”

I see! Just as Seekvaira-san said, the Magical ☆ Levia-tan shown on screen was being played by Sona-senpai! In other words, Sona-senpai had dressed up as her older sister in order to continue the show! When Rias initially told me about this, I was simply flabbergasted, and when I finally watched the official broadcast, I had to ask Rias several times “Is that really Sona-senpai?”. …Although makeup was certainly a contributing factor, it was plausible that people didn’t notice any abnormalities with this second-generation Magical ☆ Levia-tan because they were sisters. Naturally, even though Sona-senpai’s role as the second-generation Magical ☆ Levia-tan wasn’t officially made public, it was a well-known fact by the Devils that the Maou Leviathan-sama was no longer in the Underworld. ‘Is the character being played by Sona-senpai?’ —Such rumours would have spread about. Due to the current situation in the Underworld, Seekvaira-san indicated that she wanted to exchange views on the matter with the anti-terrorist team [DxD]. She had originally wanted to invite Sairaorg-san over as well, but since he had just finished competing in that match the other day, she did not insist on inviting him since he was, in all likelihood, still recuperating.

In any case, Sona-senpai had inherited Magical ☆ Levia-tan even though she found it to be so bothersome in the past…. She used to look extremely annoyed and embarrassed whenever she had to dress up as a magical girl in the past…but, the second-generation that appeared on the television screen — Sona-senpai didn't look the slightest bit embarrassed; she actually looked rather enthusiastic and even cute from time to time. The resemblance between her and her sister Leviathan-sama in the role was so uncanny that even I felt surprised. Rias answered Seekvaira-san's question,

"…Serafall-sama's decision has certainly caused unbearable heartache for her. Moreover, Sona idolises Serafall-sama more than anyone else. She probably wants to act in a cute and affectionate manner with her sister, but she has always remained calm and kept herself strictly disciplined in order to allow her sister to act as a proper Maou. Of course, there's a part of her that realises she's the younger sister of the Maou Leviathan…but, I always remember seeing her chase after Serafall-sama when she was a child. Her feelings of love for her sister are probably stronger than those I have for my brother."

While Rias spoke about her friend, her expression seemed to convey both pride and a hint of sorrow. Rias then continued,

"It's always been a bad habit of hers to take on an excessive burden. It's probably because Serafall-sama isn't here that she's decided to take over her sister's duties as much as possible, thus she's also taken over the role of [Magical ☆ Levia-tan]. Even if it's something that she doesn't enjoy doing, she wants to hold onto that position until her dear sister returns. That's what I think it must be,

and it’s an important decision that Sona has made up her mind on.”

…Because Leviathan-sama isn’t here, Sona-senpai decided to inherit that role huh. I never thought about that…but according to Rias, perhaps this was an inevitable result given the circumstances. Seekvaira-san seemed to agree. Aside from Magical ☆ Levia-tan, Sona-san did indeed seem to have received several other tasks that lay beyond the scope of Maou duties. But rather than ‘received’, it would be more correct to say that she had taken the initiative to ‘take on’ those tasks. Seekvaira-san asked,

“Regarding these things, you haven’t asked her directly about them, right?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“And she hasn’t spoken to you about them either?”

“She has simply displayed a determined expression on her face following Serafall-sama’s departure. That is all. She probably thinks that this matter is not important enough that we have to discuss it together. This is the way things are now that the situation has become like this. Since that’s the case, I won’t pursue her on the matter. That’s what my relationship with her is like.”

Even though Rias’ close friend decided to inherit her older sister’s will and take on her role in the special effects program, Rias didn’t seem particularly alarmed that her friend hadn’t spoken to her about it.

“—If I was in the same situation, I would do the same.”

—She simply said. …It was precisely because they were childhood friends that there were certain things that didn’t

have to be said to each other for an understanding to be reached. Having quietly listened to their conversation up until now, Akeno-san also said,

“I’ve always been watching her from Rias’ side as well. There is definitely a kind of tacit understanding between them.”

Beside them, Ravel also praised the friendship between Rias and Sona-senpai with “that’s a wonderful thing”. Seekvaira-san nodded and said,

“Yes, it’s a brilliant relationship that makes me want a childhood friend as well.”

Those words caused Rias to make a faint smile.

“Oh, didn’t you and I often meet each other at events ever since we were young? I consider you a friend too, you know?”

Upon hearing Rias say that, Seekvaira-san became visibly spirited.

“You’re right. Ufufu, I really want to hear you call me ‘Seek-chan’ again.”

Just as these Devils of the same generation — these two friends were conversing merrily with each other, someone knocked on the door.

“Please enter.”

After Rias responded, the person who opened the door and entered was — Elmenhilde, carrying a tray with a new pot of tea. After exchanging the teapots, Elmenhilde created a small Vampire-style magic circle with her hand and

summoned something from it. —It was a Blu-ray boxset. Moreover, they were from the Gundam series! Speaking of which, Seekvaira-san had previously (semi-forcibly) lent a Gundam Blu-ray box to Elemenhilde…. It reminded me of what had happened when I went to visit my grandma in the countryside.

“Seekvaira-sama. Given this opportunity, I will return this to you.”

“Ah yes, that’s right. I did lend that to you — the Gundam Blu-ray boxset.”

As Seekvaira-san received the Blu-ray boxset, her dignified appearance as a High-Class Devil instantly vanished, and her expression completely morphed into that of a Gundam enthusiast!

“…So that’s the one she lent to you when we met in the countryside.”

When I said that, Elmenhilde shyly and quietly replied,

“N-No, actually—”

As a gleam of light flashed across her glasses, Seekvaira-san said,

“Fufufu, this is the seventh entry from the Gundam series that I’ve lent to Elmenhilde-san.”

—What!? Since when!? How could this be!?

“T-The seventh!? T-That many!?”

I was in pure awe! Afterwards, it seems she continued to lend out Blu-ray boxsets!? Even for a gifted and talented

class on Gundam, isn't seven works from that series going too far!? Elmenhilde bashfully continued,

"L-Later on…after watching all of it, I returned it to Seekvaira-san, so she lent me a sequel and a spin-off series…"

…She acted like a complete devil with a Vampire princess!? Well, she is a Devil to begin with, so I guess it's only natural…. Seekvaira-san let out a fear-provoking laugh "Nufufufu…" and then said,

"Elmenhilde-san's favourite seems to be the [War in the Backpack] OVA. She seems to have quite the eye for such things."

—That's too much information. …No, isn't it better that I know more about one of my team members? No, it's still unnecessary information…. Seriously, things turn out like this almost every time Seekvaira-san visits! Can you please stop infecting my team members and bringing out unwanted qualities in them!? Although Elmenhilde's attitude was so haughty and condescending when we first met, it feels as though her personality is starting to change in a weird direction….

—It had become difficult to bring up any topics of conversation in the room since the mood had been affected by Sona-senpai becoming the second-generation Magical ☆ Levia-tan and also that Gundam tirade, but someone suddenly burst through the door. The person who entered — was a man in a black coat. His hair was a mixture of black and gold. Out of shock, I immediately rose to my feet!

"—! Y-You're…!"

"Long time no see, present Sekiryuutei."

—It was the Evil Dragon, Crom Cruach! I knew that he was a new member of Rias' team, but…! However, I didn't expect him to waltz into my house in such a carefree manner! I was almost given a fright by him! I didn't even notice his presence!

[He has not been in contact with the human world for a long time, so this is normal to expect from him.]

—Ddraig said…but aren't all of the people around me way too good at concealing their presence? That's strange. Perhaps I'm the only one who hasn't mastered that skill yet?

"W-What are you doing here!? Or, do you have some business with Rias?"

I asked, but he seemed disinterested in me on this occasion, and he turned to Rias as he said,

"Bananas have run out. That was one of the conditions of the contract. I came to get bananas."

…….

…B-Bananas…? Speaking of which, I hadn't asked about the details of Crom Cruach's participation in Rias' team. C-Could it be that bananas were one of the conditions of their contract…? Ravel and I could only ponder about such things from the sidelines….

"Bananas are kept in the basement pantry. Akeno, please guide him there. Ophis may be there too. Ah, Crom, you can't take Ophis outside."

Crom Cruach responded earnestly to Rias' instructions.

“I understand. I only wish to speak to her — dragon to dragon. That is also one of the conditions of the contract.”

With Akeno-san leading the way, the Evil Dragon left the room. …So the strongest Evil Dragon was baited by a promise of bananas huh….

[…It feels like a lot of dragons are greedy when it comes to food.]

You’re right, Ddraig. …When it comes to the creatures known as dragons, it seems like the proportion of weirdos is higher as rank increases…. With a cheerful smile, Rias said,

“After having a proper conversation with Crom Cruach, you’ll realise that he isn’t a bad person. He may drop by here occasionally, so please get along with him.”

G-Get along with him huh…. Well, I do know a lot of dragons, so it’s not a big deal to get along with an Evil Dragon. Even though various things had happened, our discussion about the change in Sona-senpai ended with a tentative wait-and-see approach. And of course, if Sona-senpai took the initiative to discuss things with us, then we would all be willing to listen to her. All members of Team [DxD] were really reliable people, including myself, so everyone was willing to help each other in case a member was in need. …However, Ravel silently delved into deep thought beside me. Having obtained this information ahead of our next match — what should we do against Sona Sitri’s peerage in the Rating Game? That’s probably what she’s thinking about. …In which case, we should start by holding a formal strategy meeting for taking on the Sitri peerage soon.

Part 2

All members of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team came to the Hyoudou residence and gathered in my room for the strategy meeting. This time, even our [Queen] Bina-shi came. In order to re-confirm the capabilities shown by our opponent in the games thus far, we watched recorded videos of their matches. In the videos, the familiar Sitri peerage acted in accordance with Sona-senpai's combat plan to precisely cut down their opponents' combat strength. We watched them perform under various different rulesets…yet they didn't seem to have any wasteful movements at all.

Their current team was built around the original Sitri peerage, so they were extremely well-balanced and coordinated. The members responsible for offense were led by Saji wearing Vritra's armour, followed by the Werewolf [Rook] — Loup Garou-san, the [Knight] duo — Meguri-san and Grim Reaper Bennia, and also the [Pawn] Nimura-san. The defensive members were the [Rook] Yura and [Bishop] Hanakai-san. The support members were the [Bishop] Kusaka-san, the new member and Sona-senpai. Sona-senpai was able to vary her role according to the needs, manipulate water with extreme magical precision, and also launch wide-ranging or large-scale attacks from time to time.

…The most amazing person was Saji though. The high attack power of his black flames coupled with his use of multiple lines to provide support allowed him tackle various rules and field types and made his general performance simply outstanding. By attaching his lines to an opponent, he could use black flames to cause damage to them or absorb their energy. Moreover, he also attached lines to his comrades in order to strengthen their various abilities and contributed greatly to the entire team. For example, when a team member's demonic energy was depleted, he could share with them demonic energy from another team

member who had a surplus via his lines. On one particular occasion, the video showed an opponent notice this and attempt to cut off the line, but they were unable to do so because black flames ignited across the line making it difficult to approach.

“Things become difficult to deal with once the lines are connected.”

Ravel also paid close attention to the capabilities of Saji’s lines. Naturally, Saji wasn’t the only strong person in the team. After observing the other members of the Sitri peerage in action, Xenovia said,

“…Ruruko, Meguri, Yura and Hanakai’s Artificial Sacred Gears have already reached a Balance Breaker state. Ruruko has a somewhat boastful personality…but it seems that she’s learned to become more cautious under Former President Sona’s guidance.”

Just as Xenovia said, the Artificial Sacred Gear possessors comprised of Yura, Meguri-san, Hanakai-san and Nimura-san were capable of using abilities that appeared more advanced than they had previously demonstrated. In fact, they seemed no different from authentic Sacred Gear Balance Breakers. Even the moment that it reached a Balance Breaker level appeared similar to a true awakening. In the case of Nimura-san, her Artificial Sacred Gear [Procellarum Phantom] changed form, greatly increasing the speed and strength of her legs. Meguri-san also had the infamous sword that Azazel-sensei created — [Blazer Shining Aura Darkness Samurai Sword], but the shape of the blade changed and four armoured samurai also appeared alongside her. Although they weren’t on the same level as Kiba’s Dragon Knights, it was still quite troublesome to have armoured samurai running about across the field. Ravel

watched the display of Balance Breakers from the Artificial Sacred Gears as she said,

“Phantom Move — Counter Balance. I’ve heard that’s what Balance Breakers are called in Artificial Sacred Gears.”

—Counter Balance huh. …So that’s the Balance Breaker of an Artificial Sacred Gear! It finally happened. The abilities of Azazel-sensei’s Fafnir armour were supposedly in an out-of-control state, but the members of the Sitri peerage were probably using the ‘proper’ Balance Breakers for Artificial Sacred Gears. Irina said,

“I heard that the Balance Breakers of Artificial Sacred Gears are still being researched, and work on them isn’t complete yet…”

Hmm, I also heard about that. At the very least, it was still supposed to have taken more time. Dispelling our doubts, Ravel replied,

“Supposedly, Former Governor Azazel put all of the relevant theories together before going into the Isolation Barrier Field. It’s said that the construction of his theories make it seem as though he somehow foresaw their future development, and the cadres of the Grigori were also quite surprised…. In short, the research on Artificial Sacred Gears has advanced by leaps and bounds.”

…Yeah, I don’t know what happened, but it seems like Azazel-sensei found some kind of answer before joining the fight against Trihexa. —At that moment, I voiced the one thing on my mind that bothered me the most.

“That should mean Kusaka-san has already reached the level of Counter Balance.”

Kusaka-san was also an Artificial Sacred Gear user, but in the videos that we watched, she didn't appear to display significant changes unlike Nimura-san and the others, making me more mindful of her.

"It's likely that she has already attained it."

Ravel seemed sure of it. Well, Kusaka-san's main role is to use a large number of masks to perform espionage on the opponent. In fact, she also projected masks across the entire field in the recorded Rating Game matches, allowing her to provide superb support by observing the opponents' moves and attracting their attention.

"All of the Artificial Sacred Gear users in the Sitri peerage have already reached that level. Moreover, it feels as though they've gained some rather troublesome abilities…"

I voiced my thoughts. They were originally a team with a lot of technique-type members. Now that their Sacred Gears had advanced to such an extent, it was likely that they could transform into subspecies with terrifying additional abilities. Ravel also nodded as she replied,

"Of course, it'll be dangerous to confront them directly. There's no way of knowing what kind of negative effects they might be able to inflict upon us."

Naturally, it was necessary to pay close attention to them during the match. We then shifted our focus to the new member of the Sitri team. He wielded an ancient Japanese sacred sword — Hoderi Yukihiko, an elementary school boy who wielded Totsuka-no-Tsurugi! We had met this elementary school boy in the sensory game that Azazel-sensei created, [Azazel Quest]. I never imagined that he would join the Sitri team as a [Pawn]…

“In any case, I didn’t expect that Hoderi would become one of their members.”

When I said that, Rossweisse-san replied,

“I’ve heard that it’s part of his training in order to broaden his horizons for middle school.”

“…That guy is surprisingly active. He was pretty brave even when facing off against a Dragon King.”

Given that he had the courage to face Tannin-ossan, he has the potential for great achievements. In the Tournament, he seemed to rush forward without hesitation even in the face of stronger opponents.

In this manner, we were able to confirm the status of the Sitri team through the television display. Throughout the Tournament, although the Sitri team won most of the time, they also experienced several losses. And in terms of the ranking, we sat above them. Ravel bluntly said,

“—I think that Sona-sama is not inferior to a professional player when it comes to strategy. In this regard, she is superior to me.”

Ravel also acknowledged that. Sona-san was able to fully utilise the rules and fields in the Tournament, forcing her opposing teams to play according to her tactics…. This prompted the rare occasion of Bina-shi speaking up.

“…The organised aspect of ‘strategy’ is a separate matter, isn’t it?”

In response to Bina-shi’s view, Ravel opined,

“Their team is unable to execute strategies which affect broad situations in a Rating Game.”

That was how she evaluated the Sitri team. …The Sitri team cannot utilise tactics which affect a broad situation…. Rossweisse-san also seemed to figure something out as she expressed her view.

“Overwhelming power…in other words, they lack the power of Maou-class and God-class beings to destroy the field entirely.”

Ravel nodded in agreement.

“Yes. On the other hand, we have Ise-sama — and Bina-sama, two people capable of significant impact on the field.”

The Sitri team was certainly a rather balanced team…but, they didn’t have offensive power that could match the cannon blast that I could produce under Dragon Deification. Although there weren’t many, there were indeed a number of players capable of destroying the entire field. Most of them were God-class beings, but there were also others such as Vali and Crom Cruach who could rival God-class beings. … I see, so the Sitri team are unable to reverse a situation — they are unable to execute strategies which involve the destruction of the field to render most rules ineffective. In contrast, so long as I can fire my cannon blast while under Dragon Deification, I can inflict a major blow upon the field and opponent at a critical junction. Ravel said to Nakiri,

“In terms of technique, Nakiri-san also has strategic talent.”

“Well, that depends on the type of field. Also, the effect of my abilities is still lower in a simulated space when

compared to the real ground. That’s something I recognised during our previous battle.”

Thanks to Nakiri’s techniques, he simply needed to stand on the ground in order to receive various benefits from the earth’s veins. He could increase his own combat power, control the ground surface, and had the flexibility to switch between defence and support. Ravel then inquired of Irina,

“Irina-sama, what about that move?”

“Hmm — it works in principle. But, there might be a deficiency in terms of time.”

Irina had constantly been using her fingers to trace a circle in the air. In fact, she was attempting to develop a new move that Ravel had come up with.

“It’ll be a huge help if you can improve the accuracy as much as possible before the match.”

After hearing Ravel say that…

“Got it. Leave it to me.”

Irina answered energetically. Ravel then questioned Elemenhilde,

“Elmenhilde-sama, how are things on your side?”

“Like Nakiri-san, it depends on the field. As the field changes, the conditions for what I prepare will also change.”

Elmenhilde’s Vampire abilities were quite suitable for support. In this regard, she was similar to Gasper prior to the awakening of his Sacred Gear’s power. A combat-type Vampire could be sent to the frontlines, but aside from being

able to use someone’s abilities by sucking their blood, she was just an ordinary female Vampire. Essentially, she could only be assigned a supporting role, and once the opponent had their backs against the wall, she could suck blood and fight.

“…Even so, in order to counter Kusaka-sama’s ability, Elmenhilde-sama’s power is indispensable.”

It sounded like Ravel wanted Elmenhilde to deal with Kusaka-san’s masks.

“Asia-sama, Fafnir-sama…will probably be difficult to summon.”

Hearing Ravel’s remark, Asia shyly replied,

“…Yes, it seems that he can only produce the kind of power that he displayed when he defeated Vali-san’s grandfather if I strongly believe that the opponent is a ‘bad person’…of course, if I summon him, he’ll do his best to help me…”

When we faced off against Dulio’s team, Fafnir was in the broadcast gallery. His unexpected recovery surprised us… but as Asia said, that guy can only show off his power in extreme situations. And normally, he’s just a Panty Dragon who likes underwear…. Not to mention that there are also restrictions on familiars in the Tournament. Whilst deliberating over various things, Ravel said,

“According to the rules, a familiar on the level of Fafnir-sama can only be used one time at most. If he can demonstrate the same level of power that he used against Rizevim Livan Lucifer, the match would become much easier…”

A wicked person of that level wouldn’t make such a casual appearance…but if someone like that really was participating in the Tournament, then I’d definitely feel nervous. Ravel then added,

“Also, both Asia-sama who is responsible for recovery and I as the tactician are easy targets for the opponent. This doesn’t only apply to the next match, it’s a possibility in all future matches, so we need to keep our guard up against this.”

Asia gave a firm nod. Indeed, it would only be natural for our precious healer and Ravel to be targeted, and given the opportunity, Sona-senpai would probably aim for that as well. You can never be too careful after all.

Afterwards, each of my team members gave a status update to Ravel and exchanged opinions on how to prepare for the battle. After giving an update to Ravel, Xenovia made a thoughtful expression as she demanded without hesitation,

“Ravel, can I make a selfish request?”

Ravel already seemed to have an inkling of what was coming, so she counter-questioned,

“—You wish to have a battle against Sona-sama, correct?”

Xenovia appeared rather surprised by that…and everyone seemed to feel the same way as well.

“Ah, so you understand. As expected of our tactician. Yeah, I do want to have a one-on-one against Former President Sona.”

Seriously!?

“Is it because you’re the current Student Council President of Kuoh Academy?”

When I asked that, Xenovia affirmed it.

“Yeah, the reason’s simple. I just want to have a heart-to-heart between the new and the old president.”

…By heart-to-heart, you mean a fight…. I didn’t think she was that fixated on the Former President….

“Using a fight to share your feelings huh. I guess that really suits you as a swordsman, Xenovia.”

When I said that, Bova followed with,

“I can also understand. Some things can only be exchanged in the heat of battle.”

Indeed, there were some things that could only be communicated through battle…there were times when an opponent’s feelings could be understood through a collision of fists. Precisely because of that, I started to endlessly ponder over the swirling emotions in my heart.

“That’s how it is, so I wanted to ask if there is any way to achieve that with our strategic plan.”

Xenovia asked Ravel…but Ravel turned toward me instead.

“Before I answer you, I need to confirm something — Ise-sama.”

“Hmm? Are you asking me about Saji?”

I immediately blurted out Saji’s name because he happened to be on my mind. In other words, just like how

Xenovia was fixated on Sona-san, I felt strangely focused on Saji.

“Yes. I imagine that you also want to fight against him, right?”

I…voiced my honest feelings with a sincere expression.

“—Of course. That guy deliberately came over after the matchup was announced, and when we watched the battle together in Agreas, we also talked about such things. He and I need to have a good punch-out with each other in order to move on. That much is certain.”

That guy’s feelings couldn’t be any clearer. Moreover, I also want to have a rematch with him. Ever since that Rating Game last summer, there’s been something akin to a grudge between us. That grudge…I need to fight him one more time in order to clarify and eliminate the haze that clouds my heart.

“…Will it be difficult for you to accommodate both Xenovia’s and my own selfish request in the plan, Ravel?”

“…After all, if we lose the match because of Ise’s and my selfishness, then it won’t be worth it.”

Xenovia also understood that winning the game was the most important thing, so she would probably give up if Ravel opposed the idea. Xenovia and I waited patiently for Ravel’s answer…and after a short while, Ravel began to speak with a vigour-filled expression.

“…I understand both of your feelings. So in this regard, I hope that both of you will listen to my combat plan first.”

…Both Xenovia and I clearly knew that Ravel wouldn’t discard our ideas without giving it any thought. So, both Xenovia and I nodded as we waited for Ravel to continue. After confirming our reactions, Ravel made a soft expression.

“You’re sure? Now, there are various ways to deal with the Sitri team depending on the rules—”

Like this, we began to discuss the details of our strategic plan for the battle against the Sitri team—. Indeed, everything was for the sake of defeating the Sitri team.

Line.2 The Student Council’s Secret

Part 1

Even though our team’s strategy meeting was important, we also had to live our daily school lives to the fullest. After school, Matsuda and Motohama brought up a topic just before we left the classroom.

“Summer vacation! Since the three of us are probably going to progress into Kuoh Academy’s University via recommendation, we should have some spare time! We definitely have to get girlfriends this year—”

“…Girlfriend…uh…! I originally thought that the three of us would stay the same!”

After saying that much, Matsuda and Motohama began to shed manly tears, leaving me at a loss on how to react… because both of them already knew that I was going out with Rias. The fact that they kept it a secret from our other classmates only reinforced the friendship between us. Of course, they had also said ‘introduce us to some girls aside from the ones around you next time’ and pressured me…. Girls aside from the ones around me huh…and that’s limited to ordinary humans as well, which makes things rather difficult. To begin with, I had absolutely no luck with ordinary girls. Anyway, us boys (and Kiba too) decided that we would head to the amusement park together during the summer vacation. Although I had Rias and the others, it was still important to go out with my male friends.

“We want to pick up hot chicks, so you gotta help out too, Ise.”

“The handsome prince is also going to help!”

—Matsuda and Motohama said. Because male friends had asked him to go out with them, Kiba happily said ‘Although I don’t really understand, I’ll do what I can to help’ and agreed. Kiba! Those two are just trying to abuse your handsomeness! Damn it! It’s probably because Kiba was now in the same class and group as them, and they had gotten into the habit of using him for such things! Surely, if I didn’t have a girlfriend, I’d probably rely on Kiba’s assistance as well! Afterwards, Kiba and I sent them off and we walked toward the old school building where we completed our activities for the Occult Research Club.

“So, we’re going to have a training camp this summer vacation.”

The discussion concluded with Asia-buchou’s decision, and all club members also responded with ‘got it’. Our new members seemed to look forward to the camp.

“Camping! I’m looking forward to this summer vacation!”

Le Fay seemed fairly excited about it.

<<I’ve heard that the true thrill of such activities depends on the snack budget. Perhaps the fun of choosing which snacks to get is more enjoyable with a lower budget.>>

Bennia was already thinking about snacks.

“A t-training camp! This is also my first summer vacation!”

Tosca looked happy as well. Everything that she encountered was a fresh first experience, so she was deeply interested in everything.

“The training camp sounds good, but I have to go back home during the summer vacation!”

Kunou already had plans to return home for the summer holiday. Although she had left home and come here in order to broaden her knowledge of the world, she was still an elementary school student so she probably looked forward to going back home. Ravel began to write down the camping trip into her calendar as she griped,

“…It seems there are many things to do this summer vacation.”

As the core of our team, and as my manager, Ravel would have little time to rest even during the summer vacation — but, it also meant that I would be extremely busy as a [King]! Aside from competing in the Tournament, I would also have club activities and my role as the [Oppai Dragon], so it felt like I would be even busier this summer…though having said that, I was also looking forward to going somewhere cooler for a business trip. Just as the Occult Research Club’s meeting came to an end, someone entered the club room. —It was Xenovia. Xenovia swept her eyes across everyone who was present.

“—Is Ise here?”

Does she have some kind of business with me? Just as I felt doubtful about that, Asia called to Xenovia,

“Ah, Xenovia-san! We’ve just decided on a training camp for the summer holidays! I was thinking that we should inform Rossweisse-sensei of this!”

After hearing Asia's report, Xenovia responded without taking her eyes off me.

"Oh, a training camping huh. I'd also like to go — but, I'll put that matter aside for now. Ise, there's something I need to ask you."

So like that, I went off with Xenovia to help with her request. It just so happened that it was almost the end of the discussion of our club activities, so I decided to accompany Xenovia. According to her, Saji seemed to have forgotten something, so she wanted me to accompany her to Saji's house to deliver it to him. Although Xenovia had lived in the area for a year now, she was still unfamiliar with the locality outside of her usual places, so she wanted me to come along as I was familiar with the area. I knew where Saji lived — it was only a few stops on the train from Kuoh Town where we lived. It belonged to Sona-san's territory — it was under her jurisdiction. After boarding the train, I looked at the document envelope in Xenovia's hands as I murmured,

"So Saji also forgets stuff huh."

"Yeah, he said that he had something to do, so he left the Student Council office along with the other Sitri members a little earlier…but, it's unusual for him to forget to take documents. This is for tomorrow's meeting, so that's why I want to give it to him today."

…He had something to do huh. I wonder if it has anything to do with the Tournament, or perhaps Auros Academy, or even…assisting Sona-senpai with succeeding Serafall-sama's work. It seems like they have pretty tight schedules too….

Just as I was thinking about that, something else came to mind.

“Although I know where he lives, I’ve never visited him even once.”

Indeed, I had never been to his house before. I had visited the apartment that Kiba and Gasper shared a couple of times before Valerie and Tosca came to Japan…. Saji was a friend with whom I had become acquainted after reincarnating as a Devil, and only now did I realise that I had never been to his house. Xenovia was also surprised by this.

“Really? You two seem to get along really well, so I thought it was only natural that you’d visit each other’s houses…”

“That guy just comes over to my house a lot…”

After all, my house acted as a meeting point whenever an incident occurred, so he had come over quite a number of times. After chatting like this for a while, we eventually got off the train at the closest station and bought a Castella cake from the store in front of the station to bring as a gift. We then began walking toward Saji’s house by following instructions from a smartphone.

We eventually reached the corner of a residential district which was around ten minutes’ walk from the station, and came to a stop in front of a six-storey apartment building. … There was a distinct aura that I could sense from the apartment building. It was probably a building owned by the House of Sitri, and the people who lived there were undoubtedly acquaintances of Sona-senpai. Unexpectedly, it seemed that there were actually a large number of Devils who lived quite close to us. Curiosity suddenly got the better of me, and I asked Xenovia,

“For a warrior of the Church, approaching a place like this would feel the same as approaching enemy territory, right?”

“Fufufu, there are some Devil-related buildings which can be sensed from several hundred metres away. This is a building which belongs to a High-Class Devil of the House of Sitri, so I imagine that it would conjure a rather powerful presence.”

Xenovia replied. Prior to the peace conference, a warrior of the Church would probably feel quite nervous if they stood close to a building affiliated with a High-Class Devil such as this one. …In that case, when we first met Xenovia and she entered the Hyoudou residence which was affiliated with a High-Class Devil of the House of Gremory, she must’ve had an immense amount of determination to take that first step through the door — it was something that I had only just realised.

Saji’s place seemed to be on the fifth floor, so we took the elevator up. We then walked down the corridor until we reached the last residence on the level.

Oh, it’s right on the corner of the building! Well, since he lives with his family, it’s a pretty good location. Moreover, the geographical location of the apartment itself is pretty good.

I stood in front of the Saji residence and pressed the button on the intercom. …However, it seemed as though no one was home. Alright, what do we do now? Just as I was about to consult Xenovia on the best course of action—

“Hyoudou Issei-san — and President Xenovia, right?”

Someone spoke to us from behind. As I turned around, I noticed a middle school girl who was holding hands with a young boy who looked like he was still in kindergarten. The kindergarten boy’s face and knees were plastered with band aids, and he appeared to have gotten hurt. Judging by the

plastic bags that they held, it seemed as though they were on the way home after some shopping. The middle school girl bowed to us.

“I’m Saji Genshirou’s younger sister — Kaho. This is my little brother, Gengo. Gengo, have you said hello?”

“Hello.”

—! I was instantly surprised by the identities of the middle school girl and kindergarten boy who greeted us! Saji’s little sister and little brother! That guy actually has two younger siblings! …It was the first that I had heard of this. I didn’t know that guy had such family members at all. Xenovia handed the document envelope in her hands to Saji’s younger sister.

“This is Saji’s — something your brother forgot. Could you please pass it on to him? Also, this is a Castella cake for you guys.”

“Ah, I’m so sorry. He does forget things sometimes. Thank you for the Castella.”

His sister bowed and made a wry smile as she received the envelope and the Castella cake. Alright, our business here is done. Xenovia and I shared a nod as we prepared to leave.

“Well, we’re going to head home now.”

Just as Xenovia and I began to retrace our steps down the corridor—

“Ah, please wait. Why don’t you two come in for a cup of tea so I can thank you properly?”

Saji’s little sister called out to us.

“No, we really just came here to drop something off…”

I declined with such words, but Saji’s little sister said with a smile,

“Umm — you two are the Sekiryuutei and the wielder of Durandal, right? I’ll also be cheering for your team.”

—Hmm. It seemed that his sister was more aware of our situation than I had thought. Having decided to enter the Saji residence, Xenovia and I were led to the living room. The interior of their house was kept quite neat and clean. A portrait of the three siblings was hung up on the wall, and it had probably been painted by the little brother who was still in kindergarten. The siblings seemed to share an amicable relationship.

While Saji’s younger sister supervised her little brother in getting changed in the adjacent room which had its door open, Xenovia and I sat on the sofa and probed,

“Our true identities…in other words, you also know about Saji’s true identity, right?”

“Yes, I know. But Gengo still doesn’t know.”

…It was only natural that a kindergarten-aged child wouldn’t understand. Therefore, it meant that some form of open discussion was possible. Saji’s younger sister said,

“I’ve also been watching the Tournament matches. It’s a pity about the result of your match with the Angel, Dulio-san. I was cheering for your team, Hyoudou-senpai.”

She seemed to know a lot about our situation. However, since she was related to a Devil, she was able to watch television programs from the Underworld whilst in the

human world. After learning about a side of Saji that we hadn’t known about before, Xenovia and I continuously nodded as we listened to a stream of fresh information. It was because that guy never mentioned his family. However, he always spoke up when it came to his dreams and ambitions…. I inadvertently looked over at a corner of the living room and noticed a photo frame that sat on a shelf.

“That’s a photo of our parents. There’s also grandpa and grandma.”

—Saji’s little sister informed us. Ah, just as I thought. Although, given that their mother was not at home at such a time, did it mean that something had happened, or perhaps she was at work? While that thought crossed my mind, Saji’s little sister uttered with a perfectly normal tone,

“They’ve all passed away though. Our parents passed shortly after Gengo was born, so it’s already been five years. Grandpa died last year, and grandma a long time ago.”

—!

……

……Hey, what the hell!? All of the people in those photos have already passed away…?

Both Xenovia and I looked equally shaken by the impact of the unexpected news.

“…I’m sorry, Saji never mentioned any of that.”

Due to my ignorance, all I could do was apologise. Saji’s little sister also heaved a sigh and her expression seemed to convey that she had said more than was necessary. With a slightly puzzled and sombre smile, she murmured,

“Ah — so Gen-nii didn’t mention it after all. It seems I said too much…”

…Yeah, Saji never said anything about that. No, maybe he didn’t want to mention it…. We both became Devils at around the same time and we had been friends for more than a year, but that guy…. Xenovia also spoke with a solemn expression.

“It’s also the first time that I’ve heard of this. Ruruko and the others in the Sitri peerage didn’t mention it to me either.”

Those in the Sitri peerage probably knew about it…. I see, so Saji and everyone else in the Sitri peerage never mentioned this to anyone in the Gremory peerage. Though, perhaps Rias knows about it…. Just when Xenovia and I were rendered speechless upon suddenly learning the truth about Saji’s family…

“Onee-chan, I’m changed!”

A cheerful voice loudly resounded through the house. Having changed into his home clothes, Saji’s younger brother dashed out of the room and into the kitchen. His sister followed, and opened the refrigerator to take a few items out.

“Okay good, now come and have some snacks. This is the handmade pudding that the grandma next door taught me how to make! We also have the Castella cake that our guests brought with them today!”

Upon seeing the snacks being laid out on the table, her little brother looked indubitably excited.

“Cool! Two snacks!”

“Come on, have you said thank you yet?”

Prompted by his older sister, the little brother immediately bowed toward us and shouted,

“Thank you very much!”

Hearing his vibrant voice, a smile naturally formed on our faces.

“Good, you can watch TV now.”

After gaining his sister’s approval, the little brother switched on the television in the living room and inserted a disc into the Blu-Ray player.

“Monster Watch, Monster Watch!”

A popular children’s animation began to play on the television, and the little brother gazed at the screen as he feasted on his snacks.

“I’m sorry. He really has way too much energy.”

Saji’s sister sat down beside him as she gave us an apology.

“It looked like he was crying earlier…is everything okay?”

I asked. In fact, when we encountered them in the corridor, her little brother seemed to have tear stains on his cheeks. Saji’s sister replied,

“Ah — well actually, he seems to have been fighting with a larger boy quite often recently…and that boy seems to have a rather complicated situation as he’s raised by a single mother. Children of that age sometimes feel a bit depressed, so I think they look for someone to vent their feelings on.”

Fights in kindergarten huh.

“Our family doesn’t have a father or a mother, and both grandpa and grandma have passed away too, but the time that Gen-nii and I can spend together with Gengo is actually quite fulfilling. Some members of the Sitri peerage occasionally come over to help take care of my brother, and the old couple next door also help us take care of him, so we’re really quite fortunate.”

Saji’s sister said.

Afterwards, I pried a bit more about Saji’s family situation. About their parents — their father was originally a teacher, and their mother was a museum staff member. Both of them had been engaged in education-related work. Both of them passed away five years ago — in an unfortunate traffic accident when both of them were in the car. It happened shortly after Saji’s little brother was born.

Following the accident, their grandfather took care of them and they stayed together up until last year. However, the grandfather who took care of them also passed away last year due to illness—. Having lost their loved ones — after the three siblings lost their guardian, Saji incidentally encountered Sona-senpai, and she learnt about the Sacred Gear within Saji which lead to him becoming her servant and provided him with the means for support. And then, they moved into this apartment….

It turns out that their family had gone through such an experience…and it was the first time that I had ever heard about it! I wonder why that guy didn’t tell me…sure it’s hard to say…but we’re friends! No, we’re comrades who have fought through life-or-death situations together…but he didn’t say anything…no, perhaps he didn’t want me to

worry, and he didn’t want to cause trouble for me. However…I could’ve randomly asked him about his parents…and when I think of that, I…. And so, I came to understand the meaning of his little brother’s paintings on the wall…by the time he grew up and could understand things, both of his parents were no longer present, and the only family that he knew…were his brother and sister.

Saji’s little brother looked exceptionally happy as he gazed at the animation which was being played. Seeing this, Saji’s younger sister said to us,

“Gen-nii has always said that he wants to become a teacher, right? That dream is something that he suddenly became focused on after he became a servant of Sona-san. Before he became a Devil, I clearly remember him saying that he wanted to get a stable job as a municipal office worker.”

With a pained look, she continued,

“I think Gen-nii wants Gengo to see the path that mum and dad used to walk in life. Mum and dad weren’t able to show Gengo how they worked, and that’s why Saji is engaged in education-related work — so that he can show it to Gengo.”

Saji’s little sister made a wry smile as she said,

“I think Gen-nii is trying to act cool to make up for the roles of both mum and dad.”

……Xenovia and I couldn’t utter a single word.

Afterwards, we talked about school and the Tournament for about ten or so minutes before bidding farewell to the Saji family. When we left, Saji’s little sister said to us at the door,

“I’ll be cheering for you in the Tournament…but, my support for the Sitri team will have priority.”

On the way home, I looked up at the sky as I mused,

“…Everyone has their own burdens to carry huh.”

My comrades had also gone through their own complicated and unfortunate encounters before arriving at Rias’ side. I had heard that the original lives of the Sitri peerage members weren’t exactly smooth, but Sona-senpai provided them with salvation…. Walking beside me, Xenovia said,

“I think this is precisely the reason why we should cherish and appreciate our day-to-day happiness.”

—.

…I was momentarily surprised by how she could occasionally come up with such profound statements….

It seems that this minor detour has given me a little more to worry about before our important match. I guess I’ll go on a date with Rias on our next day off, and I can discuss it with her then.

After making such a mental note to myself, I continued on my way home—.

Part 2

And so, on our following day off—.

Rias and I — along with Kunou and Lint Sellzan-san went to a local shopping mall. Last year, as a member of the

Gremory peerage, I fought against the Sitri peerage in a game field version of this shopping mall. Rias said to Lint-san,

“Here we are, Lint. You can go and explore the places that you want to see.”

Whilst Kunou gazed around at various places in the shopping mall, I also said to her,

“You can head off too, Kunou. But, don’t go overboard, and be careful not to get lost.”

Kunou excitedly raised her hand and replied,

“Don’t worry! I’ve completely familiarised myself with this shopping mall! Come on Lint-dono, let’s go to the game centre first!”

Kunou tugged on Lint-san’s hand as she merrily pointed in the direction of the game mall.

“Oh, a game centre? I want to try the so-called ‘Crane Game’ at least once.”

“Leave it to me! Ise and Rias-sama can enjoy shopping together!”

After saying that, Kunou and Lint-san briskly walked together toward the other end of the shopping mall. … Children of that age really do enjoy places like department stores — I recalled how I used to be like that as well. Especially toy shops and game centres. I used to frequently ask my parents to take me to those places. Perhaps thinking that Kunou’s behaviour was rather amusing, Rias giggled and said,

“So she says.”

“Geez, Kunou — she begged me to take her to a shopping mall…”

There was one time when all of us came to this shopping mall, and back then, Kunou looked around everywhere with her eyes aglow as well. There were also large department stores in Kyoto, but she said that it was a separate matter, and there was also the fact that the people in her hometown seemed less willing to take her to such places in the human world. Moreover, it seemed she always had someone accompanying her whilst in Kyoto, so it was probably difficult for her to walk around freely like this. I guess it’s not easy being the Nine-Tailed Princess. Rias said,

“The same goes for Lint. She’s not accustomed to ordinary life at all, and isn’t good at shopping, so I thought today was a good opportunity to bring her along…did I cause trouble for you?”

Would it have been better if Lint-san wasn’t here during our date? —That’s probably what she meant. I shook my head.

“I’m happy just to be here with you, Rias. Ever since I became a [King], I haven’t even had the chance to go shopping with you like this.”

Not long ago, the two of us used to come here and shop together. After becoming a [King] — a High-Class Devil, my workload suddenly multiplied, and I couldn’t even think about going on dates. And not only with Rias, but also with Asia and the other girls. Rias held my hand as she said,

“As expected of my boyfriend — okay, we’ll keep an eye on those two while we shop…and have a nice date.”

“Yeah. Dates like this every once in a while aren’t too bad.”

I squeezed Rias’ hand in return as we began our date.

While keeping an eye on Kunou and Lint-san who were playing on Crane Game and Medal Game machines, Rias and I sat in a corner of the game centre drinking milkshakes while we conversed about various things that we had encountered in our lives. We spoke about school, Devils, the Tournament, and also — about Saji’s circumstances that I had just learned of not long ago.

“Did you already know about Saji’s situation at home?”

I asked Rias. Although she appeared somewhat surprised, she nodded as if she had managed to figure something out.

“…Yes…since you’re asking, did you only find out about it recently?”

“Yeah, I found out not long ago. Have you known for a long time, Rias?”

Rias nodded.

“Yes, Sona told me about it. I didn’t tell you because you’re friends, so I thought that Saji-kun would tell you on his own. And…it’s also a surprise to me that you’d never been to Saji-kun’s house before. If you had been to his house…he probably would have told you.”

“Hahaha, Xenovia also said something similar to me. I guess both of us got too busy with school, our Devil Jobs, and various situations with team [DxD].”

Even though we had been comrades-in-arms for so long, I suppose it was quite unusual that I hadn’t been to the Saji

residence even once, considering our relationship as boys of the same age. After all, I went over to Matsuda and Motohama's houses during the holidays after I started high school. Rias said

"Saji-kun…probably didn't want to tell you. Although this is just my guess, I think he didn't want you to worry about him. And he didn't want you to be overly considerate for his sake."

"…So that's the reason huh."

…I had those exact same thoughts. But, it still made me feel a little disappointed. If I had known, perhaps I could've helped him with something…. …To him, perhaps that would count as unwarranted concern. Just as I pondered over it, Rias continued,

"Moreover, the reason why you never went to Saji-kun's house — isn't it because you somehow sensed that something was odd in the way he behaved, and you subconsciously refrained from asking? You were actually able to read the mood and act accordingly."

—.

Saji exhibited the aura that he didn't want me to visit his house, and I subconsciously noticed that, which is why I never brought up the topic of visiting his place huh…. … Perhaps…that was correct. With that guy — he was like a close friend to me at school and when we were in the Underworld, but in a sense, the aura of 'I don't want you to get any closer than this' that he gave off was stronger than it was with Kiba and Gasper. After school, even if that guy was free, it didn't feel right for me to ask him if he wanted to go around and browse some stores on the way home. But if it was Kiba, I'd casually invite him on such ventures. Rather

than it being due to the fact that we belonged to different peerages, perhaps it was because of the unique atmosphere that existed between me and Saji. Whilst peering at my face, Rias asked,

“Do you feel uncertain about how to fight against him in the coming match?”

“If that’s the case, then that guy will scold me. And this isn’t something I can tell my peerage either.”

“Yes. Sairaorg and the others will probably be watching the match as well, so I imagine that there will be significant backlash if there is any hesitation in your attacks.”

…Yeah, that’s absolutely right. Even though I had learned of Saji’s situation, if that made my fists any duller, then how could I possibly stand proud and face Sairaorg-san and the others who had gone through their own unfortunate circumstances along the way? More importantly, if I hesitate and refuse to fight because of this, then I can no longer say the he…that Saji is my friend.

“…If I tell Ravel about this, I’m sure she’d get angry.”

Upon hearing those words, Rias simply smiled and said,

“That girl is doing her best to make you successful. Of course she would scold you.”

Ravel sure is strict. My ambition is also Ravel’s ambition. That’s why she becomes so determined and persuades me to defeat my opponents. In order to inspire her [King], my manager is capable of doing anything. …After discussing Saji’s situation with Rias, it felt as though my mood had lightened up.

“I can only talk to you or Azazel-sensei about things like this. I’m very grateful and glad that to have your support.”

Whenever I felt depressed like this, I used to talk to sensei. But he was now in a far-away place, so it wasn’t convenient for me to speak to him…although there was a method for me to communicate with him, the line would also be connected with Sirzechs-sama and the others, making it difficult for me to discuss such a topic. That was why I really appreciated having Rias by my side right now. Rias giggled as she said,

“Fufufu, that’s true. Asia and Xenovia truly admire you from the bottom of their hearts, so they feel the need to comply with your decisions. And I will simply be a sounding board for you. The rest is something that you need to think about on your own — you’re already a [King] after all.”

Something to decide for myself — indeed. …Asia, Xenovia and the others had all expressed their willingness to follow me. That made it difficult for me to ask them such topics in private because I felt that it was better if they didn’t see my weak side. They were probably using their own methods to mentally prepare for the upcoming match as well. I couldn’t give them new troubles at a time like this — to reveal to them the doubts of the [King]. Rias raised a finger as she said,

“Allow me to give you a suggestion before the match, or perhaps consider it a reminder on how to defeat Sona — that girl is undoubtedly strong. Her ability to construct effective strategies is exceptional. At the same time, she is very delicate…she is a girl of the same age as me.”

—A girl of the same age.

…Indeed, Sona-senpai was a girl of the same age as Rias. Although she normally had an air of calmness about her, she

also had a passionate side in taking the initiative to inherit her sister’s business. At the same time, she was also an ordinary girl who was saddened by the loss of her sister.

“Ise, I got a Giga Rachu-kun!”

“I got a Hawaiian-version of Rachu-kun.”

Kunou and Lint-san held up the [Rachu-kun] series plushies that they had obtained from the Crane Game machines and showed them to us. Rias praised them with ‘that’s amazing’ as she petted both of their heads. Yeah, she totally looks like a mother! So when we have children, it’ll feel like this huh…Lint-san is just a little big though. Rias announced to the two of them,

“Alright, since we’re done with the games, let’s go shopping over there. Let’s take a look at the clothes first.”

““Okay~~””

Kunou led Lint-san by hand as we left the game centre. As she looked upon the scene, Rias said,

“Girls are good. In the future, I want at least one daughter.”

—The words that came from her mouth were so electrifying! O-Of course, I also want to have children with Rias in the future! I just didn’t expect Rias to say that right now. Have her maternal instincts taken over?

However, Rias also said with confidence,

“But, I think that our first child will be a boy. I don’t know why, but I just have this strong feeling about it. Ufufu.”

After saying so, Rias took my hand and we began to stroll through the shopping mall again. I clasped her hand in return, while thoughts such as ‘My son…will probably be a pervert after all’ streamed through my mind and caused me unnecessary worry—.

In this way, Rias and I looked after Kunou and Lint-san while we wandered through the shopping mall — at the same time, this helped to alleviate my worries which had arisen from Saji, and really aided with my mental preparation for the next match.

—Sona-senpai, and Saji. I…won’t lose!

Line.3 The Basis of the Dream

Having finished his work at Auros Academy, as well as having attended the strategy meeting for the upcoming match, Saji Genshirou returned to his house at dinner time.

“I’m home—.”

He called out at the doorway as he took his shoes off, and his little brother — Gengo quickly dashed out to greet him.

“Welcome home, onii-chan!”

Saji ruffled Gengo’s hair as he walked into the living room.

“Hey, were you waiting for me to have dinner, Gengo?”

Dinner — the aroma of curry wafted out from the kitchen and into his nostrils. Since he had just finished work and a meeting on top of that, he was actually starving.

“Gen-nii, welcome home.”

His little sister — Kaho seemed to be relaxing in the living room. As soon as she learned that her brother had returned, she immediately began to prepare the table for dinner. Noticing that Kaho was acting mildly shy, Saji inquired,

“…Is something wrong?”

Realising that he had seen through her pretence, Kaho heaved a sigh and then began to explain,

“—To tell the truth, Hyoudou Issei-san and President Xenovia came over just earlier. Because you forgot some documents, they…”

When she said that, her eyes — drifted toward the photo frame on the shelf which contained a photo of their parents. That was enough for Saji to deduce what had happened.

“…I see, so they know now.”

Saji scratched the back of his head. …He hadn’t intended to conceal it from them, but he felt that such a topic wasn’t something he had to bring up of his own accord, and so he never spoke about his family situation with Hyoudou Issei or Xenovia whom he worked with on the Student Council.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know that you didn’t tell them…will this affect the match?”

Kaho asked with worry. She knew just how important the next match was for her brother, which was why she asked. Saji made a wry smile as he shook his head.

“No, it shouldn’t — that guy won’t hesitate to strike. That’s the kind of man that he is. But, when we see each other at school…it might be better if I talk to him about it.”

…Indeed, that was the kind of friend that Hyoudou Issei was. He was also a comrade-in-arms, and someone of the same generation. Precisely because of that, Saji had always chased after him.

—If that guy dares to hesitate, I’ll just punch him right then and there. That’ll wake him up.

However, his sister still felt remorse that she had played a part in the affair, and so she apologised,

“I’m really sorry.”

“It’s okay. Come on, let’s eat.”

Saji motioned for his sister to set the table, and the three of them laid out three dishes onto the table, one for each person.

“““Itadakimasu.”””

Just as the three of them began to have curry in the living room, Saji reminisced a little about the past.

—Five years ago, my parents died in a car accident.

It had happened around half a year after Gengo was born. His father was a teacher, and after leaving the school where he worked, he began to drive home, picking up Saji’s mother from work along the way. After the two of them joined up and started driving home together, they got involved in a head-on collision with a truck where the driver had dozed off, and they never returned. Saji was thirteen years old and had just started middle school whereas his sister Kaho was a ten-year-old fourth-grade student….

As a result of the sudden loss of their parents, the three siblings were thrust into an incomprehensible situation, and the one who took up the responsibility of caring for them was their grandfather on their father’s side. Their grandmother had already passed away, but their grandfather took them in so that they could live together, and he cared for them in the place of their parents. However, even the grandfather who had been taking care of them — also passed away at the beginning of last year due to illness. Lying on his deathbed in a hospital room, the grandfather called a nurse to bring Saji in. While shedding tears of remorse, he rasped,

“…Grandpa originally wanted to see you all grow up into fine adults…sorry, I’m sorry, Genshirou…”

Watching his grandfather continuously apologise — Saji was unable to say a thing and tears simply rolled down his cheeks in silence. For nearly four years, their grandfather took care of them in place of their mother and father — he had steadfastly taken up that heavy burden and granted all of their unreasonable demands. It was all thanks to his grandfather that he had successfully made it into high school, and his little sister into middle school. His grandfather even participated in school activities in place of their parents. Whenever they had excursions or sports festivals, their grandfather prepared lunchboxes for them. Their grandfather also took care of Gengo—. With a faint, raspy voice, his grandfather had murmured,

"Genshirou…Gengo…will grow up without knowing his parents…grandpa wanted to take good care of you siblings in place of your parents…so, Genshirou, as Gengo's older brother, you must take the place of your father."

That was his grandfather's request — a plea to the man named Genshirou.

"I never imagined that I would have to entrust this kind of thing to you when you're still a child yourself…if you must hold a grudge against someone, then let it be me…"

His grandfather raised his thin and feeble hand to caress Saji's cheek. Shortly afterwards — his grandfather passed on. The three siblings of the Saji family — became lonely and helpless. Even though Saji wanted someone to look after his younger siblings, he didn't have the financial capacity to do so. The reality that a high school student was unable to handle the situation weighed heavily on Saji. The biggest problem was — without a guardian, it meant that the three siblings could be separated from each other. Just when he felt completely lost and his heart was filled with

unease — Saji encountered Sona. By sheer chance, Saji received a summoning leaflet near the local train station. Without giving it much thought, he returned home with it, and when he voiced his uneasiness of the future whilst at home, the leaflet suddenly glowed — and the Student Council President of Kuoh Academy that he attended emerged from it. After learning of Sona's true identity, Saji explained his situation to her. Sona then performed a search within his body and discovered *that item*.

—Sacred Gear [Absorption Line].

After learning that such a Sacred Gear existed within his body, Saji successfully called forth its power, and formed a Master-Servant contract with Sona to reincarnate as one of her servants. At the same time, he also joined the Student Council and gained the determination to work as her arms and legs. And so, with the support of the House of Sitri, Saji was able to move into this apartment. Everyone who lived in the building was affiliated with the House of Sitri one way or another. The residents who were aware of their situation acted with kindness toward the three Saji siblings. The money that Saji earned from working as a member of the Sitri peerage all went toward living funds to support Kaho and Gengo, as well as savings for the future. Although they had gone through a turbulent period and faced various struggles, the Saji family could now enjoy a stable life.

While eating his curry, Saji looked back over the events of his earlier life—. Inadvertently, Saji noticed the change with his younger brother — his face and knees had been plastered with band aids. Saji immediately knew what the reason was — most likely a fight in kindergarten. Saji asked Gengo,

"Gengo, did you lose a fight?"

Although Gengo originally had a smile on his face, his lips suddenly became upturned and he said in a disheartened tone,

“……Acchan is so big that my tackles and punches don’t work.”

Saji had heard that the opponent was the child of a single-parent family. The other boy’s situation was just as complicated as the Saji family’s. Realising this, that boy wanted to vent his feelings of distress, and thus resorted to his fists. Saji was able to sympathise with the other boy. Saji put his spoon down and flatly professed to Gengo,

“Listen up, Gengo. Your brother occasionally fights as well, and everyone he fights against is stronger than him. But your brother never cries, and he always moves forward. Do you know why?”

Gengo shook his head.

“—It’s because I want to let the other side know that no matter how strong they are, I won’t lose to them. So, you also have to show them your strength, Gengo. If someone punches you twice, then it’s okay to return one punch to them. If they punch you three times, then return two punches. If you do that, then no one will ever think that you’re weak, Gengo.”

It was what Saji had experienced up until now, and it was his approach to fighting — the answer and mindset that he had against stronger foes. …Indeed, Saji felt as though he had been defeated by Hyoudou Issei numerous times. Not only in battle, but as someone of the same generation, as a comrade, and as a Devil…the difference between them had grown so large that he felt that he had been defeated—.

At the strategy meeting earlier today, Saji made a rare request to his master, Sona Sitri.

[President, I have a request. If the conditions of the game allow it…I want to have a one-on-one fight against Hyoudou.]

His request — was to have a head-on clash against Hyoudou Issei. Saji was well aware of how unfavourable and unreasonable it was to their match. Up until the point that he had mentioned it, he had tried to restrain and dissuade himself until the last moment. Yet…and yet, he was unable to give up on it. He was unable to suppress his own feelings.

—I want to fight against that guy.

Such thoughts had continued to balloon in his mind after their matchup was announced, reaching the point where he could no longer control himself, and he even brought it up without prior discussion with Sona. As a result, Shinra Tsubaki loudly reprimanded him as the [Queen] and also as Sona’s right-hand woman,

[Saji! This is an extremely important match! In particular, Hyoudou’s team is a part of the Gremory peerage, and our battle against them is also vital to compensate for our humiliation last year!]

Even though the deputy leader chided him in such a manner, Saji continued to stare directly into Sona’s eyes, waiting for her answer. At that time, his comrade Hanakai Momo raised her hand and implored,

[President Sona, could you please grant Gen-chan’s request?]

She expressed her respect for Saji’s hopes.

[—Even you’re saying such things, Momo!?”

In turn, Shinra Tsubaki was surprised…but Hanakai wasn’t the only one who raised her hand. Saji’s junior, Nimura Ruruko also said

[President Sona, Tsubaki-san, I also support Genshirou-senpai.]

[Even you, Ruruko! Do you all understand just how important our next match is!?]

Shinra Tsubaki’s flamboyant voice was mixed with elements of disbelief and anger, yet the number of people who agreed with the trending sentiment only increased.

[If Momo-chan and Ruruko are in favour, then I also agree.]

[I’ll follow suit then.]

Kusaka Reya and Tomoe Meguri also raised their hands in support.

[Reya and Meguri too!?]

As the number of people expressing their support of Saji continued to rise, Shinra Tsubaki became troubled. As someone who tried to keep her cool more than anyone else, the peerage members’ support of Saji’s selfishness was a complete shock to her. Yura Tsubasa similarly expressed her support.

[I’ve supported Genshirou from the beginning — because Hyoudou has been the only one in Genshirou’s eyes for a long time. I think everyone here is capable of seeing that.]

It was beyond Saji's own expectations that every peerage member aside from Sona and Shinra Tsubaki supported him. Sona heaved a sigh, and asked Saji

[Saji, you're a smart person. You've made this request despite knowing that our team's tactics may fall apart…are you truly that eager to fight against Ise-kun?]

Clenching his fist tightly, Saji conveyed his heartfelt emotions,

[…The first time I saw that guy, I thought he was just an ordinary pervert. I thought that he was chosen by Rias-senpai based on a chance encounter, and that it was simply his luck that made him the Sekiryuutei.]

Upon hearing that one of the notorious Perverted Trio had become a Devil, Saji looked upon him with contempt. But, whenever Saji saw him, his cognition was gradually rewritten—. Every time something happened, Hyoudou Issei stood up for the sake of his peerage, he unhesitatingly charged forth regardless of the enemy that he faced, and deepened the bonds with his companions.

[But I was wrong. That guy's encounters with Rias-senpai, Asia-san and Xenovia-san were all inevitable. And though they were inevitable…that guy has been able to overcome all of his obstacles thus far because of his own hard work! He always puts his life on the line! He gives it his all! Everything is a result of his effort! If…I was the Sekiryuutei and stood in his place, I'd surely be dead in six months.]

…He had come to understand him because he had been close enough to observe. Hyoudou Issei's journey through a year was populated by a hellish series of events — logically speaking, death would've been a natural consequence. But even so, he survived…he was promoted to a Mid-Class Devil

before Saji, and even became a High-Class Devil. Sona asserted,

[That's right. Ise-kun is — without doubt, a hero. He is the embodiment of effort and miracles, and ceaselessly climbed to attain his current status. In the face of such an opponent, you—]

Saji interrupted Sona, and shouted,

[I want to defeat him…we're from the same generation. We became Devils at the same time. We worked hard at the same time. We fought against enemies at the same time. We also overcame life-or-death situations at the same time. And still, I can't win against that guy! The further I advance, the more I feel that I've been left behind! Even if I make myself a hundred times stronger, that guy will make himself more than a thousand times stronger!]

Hyoudou Issei was a constant source of miracle-like phenomena, and combined with his hard work, he became stronger and stronger. Saji was well aware of that. Even so, Saji — belonged to the same generation. They became Devils at the same time. They both possessed the power of a dragon, they both became servants of a High-Class Devil, and they both joined team [DxD]. Saji's efforts were no lesser than his, and his experience in fighting and surviving battles was not inferior either. In his Devil Jobs as well, he did his best so that he wouldn't lose to Hyoudou Issei. —But even after doing all that, he was still unable to win against his friend of the same age who belonged to the same generation, Hyoudou Issei.

[But even so, I…don't want to be left behind by that guy. In order to stand on the same stage and declare with pride

that ‘I belong to the same generation as that guy, and I’m also his comrade and friend’, I can’t afford to lose to him!]

Precisely because they were friends, he didn’t want to be left behind—. Although he was reluctant to put his feelings into words, they were his heartfelt emotions. He didn’t want to be left behind by his friend of the same generation — he wanted to get stronger with him. He wanted to stay by his side. Saji then continued,

[I finally have a chance to face that guy in full public view…I want to fight against him. A one-on-one fight. I want to continue our unfinished business from that day, finish that battle from last year, and get revenge for that time! I want to send that guy flying, to prove that I won’t lose to him!]

The instant that the matchup for the Tournament was announced, a craze erupted from the depths of his body. What appeared in his mind was — his battle against Hyoudou Issei in the Rating Game one year ago, and his own defeat. He had dreamt of the scene several times, and it stayed fresh in his mind whenever he was alone. Every time it reappeared in his mind, he became filled with regret. Saji was clearly aware that the emotions embroiled in his heart could only be cleared away if he had a rematch with that guy. There was a possibility that the result of this confrontation would make him feel even more disgruntled than before. But even that was fine.

Even if that is the case, right now — I just want to let all of this fervour pour out onto that guy. I want that guy to know that I’ve also gotten stronger. —I want to challenge Hyoudou without any worries or concerns.

While Saji spoke his mind to Sona, the taciturn werewolf — Loup Garou opened his mouth.

[…Master, you should allow Saji and the Sekiryuutei to fight.]

It surprised everyone that the normally reticent man had said such a thing. Even Sona was no exception.

[Even you, Loup Garou?]

Loup Garou placed his hand on Saji's shoulder and spoke to Sona with a sharpened gaze.

[Because we're both warriors, I can understand…no, because we're both men, I can understand. It doesn't make sense at all. Tactics and strategy are certainly important for battle, but it's also a fact that some things cannot be resolved with them.]

Loup Garou lightly bumped his fist against Saji's chest.

[—A man always has a man that he absolutely doesn't want to lose to. Since that's the case, all that's necessary is a battle. There is no other way to resolve these feelings without a fight.]

Loup Garou's passionate words — caused tears to well up in Saji's eyes.

[Loup Garou-san…]

Bearing witness to this scene, the new member, Hoderi Yukihiko cocked his head in puzzlement…

[I feel like I understand, yet I don't quite understand…but I can feel the passion in Saji-senpai's words! And by sending a

dragon to tackle a dragon, I think the reaction from the crowd will be much more vibrant.]

—But he still enthusiastically said that. It seemed that he already had his own thoughts on the matter. After taking a sip of tea, Bennia said,

<<Regardless, isn't Saji-niisan the only one who can face the Oppai Dragon head-on?>>

Bennia could occasionally make such level-headed statements. Just as Bennia said, it was the same conclusion that they had also reached in this meeting — the only one who could possibly stop the Heavenly Dragon-class Hyoudou Issei in a battle of strength was the Dragon King-class Saji. After listening to each of their member's thoughts on the matter, Shinra Tsubaki let out a sigh as she sank back in her seat. No matter what she said, the other members were unlikely to listen, which meant that the final decision rested with their master. Having listened to the opinions of Saji and the other members — Sona smiled a little.

[…Really, Saji and the rest of you, as well as our opponent Issei — you're all such foolish children.]

After taking a moment to adjust her mood, Sona proclaimed,

[In essence, I intend to follow the plan that we just discussed to deal with the match…but in any case, there is no one aside from Saji who can stop Ise-kun. Also, if he knows that you're participating—]

Sona then concluded,

[The Sekiryuutei will also singlehandedly accept the challenge of Dragon King Saji Genshirou. I don't think that

the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team will get in the way. Since that's the case, we should send you out. It'll also be good entertainment for the Rating Game. If our actions are contrary to the desires of the audience, then that will also be a demerit for us. I'm sure most of the audience are looking forward to the battle between you and Ise-kun.]

After saying that much, Sona laughed.

[—Those are simply my superficial words. It would also tarnish my pride if my proudest servant suffered a defeat and couldn't get back at Ise-kun for it. Saji, it doesn't matter what the outcome is so long as you must show everyone your strong side. You have to show every faction how strong the Devil named Saji Genshirou is — with that, no one will look down on you or us.]

After listening to his master's opinion, Saji — shed manly tears. His master…Sona Sitri agreed to Saji's request. Finally, Sona said to him,

[However, I will decide on the timing for when we launch an attack on Ise-kun. Are you okay with that, Saji?]

[Yes!]

Sona and his comrades had accepted his once-off selfish request, which made Saji feel truly grateful to all of them—.

While he recalled the exchange which had unfolded earlier in the day, his dinner with Kaho and Gengo came to an end.

Later, after taking a bath with his little brother, Saji clapped his hands together and prayed in front of the photos of his parents and grandparents on the shelf.

—Dad, mum. Thank you for giving me a Sacred Gear.

The [Sacred Gear System] was generally considered to be a relic of the God of the Bible. Despite this, Saji still believed that the ones who bestowed this power upon him were the parents who had given birth to him, and the grandfather who had raised him up. Because of the power given to him by his family members, he was able to provide food and shelter for Kaho and Gengo. Since he had become a Devil, it was no longer possible for him to go to the same place as his parents or grandparents after death. Therefore, he would never again see his father and mother, nor his grandparents. But despite that, Saji still decided on this path — he chose the world in which he would be a Devil.

—I want to maintain this family. I want to continue living with Kaho and Gengo.

…However, by becoming a Devil, it meant that Kaho and Gengo would grow old and pass away far earlier than him. The time that they could spend together — could be less than eighty years.

—When they see me with an appearance no different from my youth, will they still call me ‘brother’ and ‘family’?

It was something which Saji had always been afraid of — but right now, Saji asserted that it didn’t matter.

—Even if they start to resent me afterwards, as long as they can live well and grow up into fine adults…that is enough. What I have to go through doesn’t matter so long as Kaho and Gengo can live healthy lives.

However, despite this mentality, Saji still had his own goals.

—Father, I also want to become a ‘teacher’. If I had known earlier, I would’ve asked you why you chose to become a

teacher. I've always regretted it…so if I become a 'teacher', will I be able to understand your feelings a bit? In that way, can I show Gengo?

At the same time, a different kind of fervour also emerged from the depths of his body.

—But you know what…dad, mum, grandpa, grandma, the next match has something that I eagerly look forward to, just as much as my dreams.

Appearing in Saji's mind — was the figure of the reliable comrade and close friend of the same generation that he wanted to defeat.

Kaho noticed Saji praying in front of their parents, and asked,

“What did you pray for?”

“I made a promise to them that I’ll punch Hyoudou tomorrow.”

“After I take Gengo over to the grandma next door to look after tomorrow, I’ll find some time to watch about an hour of the match. Sona-san also gave me a transportation magic circle.”

“…If the grandma is okay with it then that’s fine.”

“Yeah, don’t lose before I go.”

“Of course.”

Saji deeply looked forward to tomorrow’s match—.

Because he could butt heads with that guy again—.

Team Member

- [Sekiryuutei of the Blazing Truth] Team Tournament Registered Team Members
  - [King] — Hyoudou Issei
  - [Queen] — Bina Lessthan
  - [Rook] — Nakiri Kouchin Ouryuu
  - [Rook] — Bova Tannin
  - [Knight] — Xenovia Quarta
  - [Knight] — Shidou Irina
  - [Bishop] — Asia Argento
  - [Bishop] — Ravel Phoenix
  - [Pawn (4)] — Rossweisse
  - [Pawn (2)] — Elmenhilde Karnstein

- [Sona Sitri] Team Tournament Registered Team Members
  - [King] — Sona Sitri
  - [Queen] — Shinra Tsubaki
  - [Rook] — Yura Tsubasa
  - [Rook] — Loup Garou
  - [Knight] — Meguri Tomoe
  - [Knight] — Bennia
  - [Bishop] — Hanakai Momo
  - [Bishop] — Kusaka Reya
  - [Pawn (5)] — Saji Genshirou
  - [Pawn (1)] — Nimura Ruruko
  - [Pawn (2)] — Hoderi Yukihiko

※ 1. The [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] Team's Rossweisse-senshu and Nakiri Kouchin Ouryuu-senshu have exchanged positions this time.

※ 2. Saji Genshirou-senshu's piece value (Tournament standard) is primarily based on the full resurrection of the Dragon King Vritra that resides in his body.

※ 3. The [Sona Sitri] Team’s Hoderi Yukihiko-senshu is not a member of Sona-senshu’s peerage, but he is a team member.

Line.4 The Revenge Match Begins!

The day of the match—.

Our [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team arrived at the Tournament venue which was located in the Fallen Angels' Underworld territory, [Armaros Colosseum]. The round stadium was named after a certain Cadre — the Cadre of the Grigori who was a master of anti-magic. Enormous statues of Armaros stood on both sides of the main entrance, and it felt as though they could suddenly cry 'Gahahahahaha! Gri — gori —' at any moment.

We had already lined up inside the arena, and the game was about to begin. All members of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team and the [Sona Sitri] team had already assembled in the centre of the stadium ring. Both teams stood in a line facing each other, waiting for that moment to arrive—. The Fallen Angel responsible for the live broadcast shouted into their microphone,

<<Welcome, everyone! A battle of the [Azazel Cup] Tournament is about to begin today! Today's matchup is a battle between the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team which everyone has had their eyes on, and the [Sona Sitri] team which belongs to Maou Leviathan's younger sister, and one of the [Rookies Four]! Now, it's time for us to decide on the rules for this game!>>

A variety of rulesets were spun around on the gigantic stadium screen like a high-speed roulette wheel. Shortly afterward, the ruleset was determined. What appeared on the screen was — [One Day Long War]! In response, not only our team, but also the Sitri team frowned. It was my first

time playing under these rules…but it was actually this one! The announcer bellowed,

<<The decided ruleset is [One Day Long War]! Unbelievable, absolutely unbelievable! This is big! As the name suggests, this game type is a drawn-out battle that takes an entire day!>>

Indeed, this ruleset was the exact opposite of the [Lightning Fast] ruleset that had been used in the previous match between Sairaorg-san and Cao Cao! It was long and drawn-out — the rules enforced a full-day time limit during which we would traverse a vast area and take down our opponents. Due to the size of the prepared field, the ability to search and locate an opponent became important, and it was a test of each player's stamina and endurance. … However, in professional Rating Games, there were also rulesets which involved multi-day battles…so in a multitude of ways, Rating Games were all about stamina and patience.

<<Ahem — to all audience members and those watching from their televisions, due to the adoption of this rule, a long time is—.>>

While the announcer explained the rules to the audience, I locked eyes with Sona-senpai who stood before me. …Since we were both ranked as [King], Sona-senpai stood directly in front of me. Sona-senpai candidly said to me,

"A year ago, I never would have imagined that the Ise-kun whom Rias introduced me to would now be a [King], standing before me with his own team — congratulations on coming this far."

—.

…Her generous welcome to me as a High-Class Devil made me feel so overjoyed that tears nearly overflowed from my eyes…but I held them in. Sona-senpai's expression changed into one filled with competitive spirit as she declared to me,

"Since you're standing here before me, I have to defeat you in order to achieve our goals."

Her words were a calm and simple declaration of war. Facing her, I countered with

"—We'll be the ones to win."

I also turned to Saji, and we both stared deeply into each other's eyes.

"Saji, let's finish our fight from a year ago."

"Yeah, that's exactly what I want, Hyoudou."

After confirming each other's intent, and while both teams were high on morale, the announcer declared,

<<Very well, it's time to teleport to the field! After teleportation, both teams will have access to the field's terrain, so please use that map to become familiar with the topography. Now—.>>

Our bodies were enveloped in a shroud of light for the teleportation.

<<Begin the teleportation!>>

Amidst the gradually intensifying teleportation light, I looked over at Ravel. Ravel had a faint smile — because the chosen ruleset was something that she had 'sought'. I recalled the battle plan that we had previously deliberated

with Ravel. At the time, Ravel had presented the Sitri team’s battle record for us to view.

[This is the Sitri team’s battle record…have you all noticed anything?]

After reading through the record, Rossweisse-san immediately seemed to notice something, and she expressed her view.

[I see, so when pit against teams possessing high offensive firepower, their win rate is not as good.]

—.

I see, so they’re more likely to lose against teams with high offensive power.

Ravel said,

[Yes, that is a major weakness of the Sitri team. In fact, they do not perform well when faced with teams that possess high offensive power and a solid strategy. After all, the level of power that they’re capable of dealing with has limits.]

After listening to Ravel say that, Irina revealed an expression of surprise.

[Eh? So you’re saying that they’re unlikely to defeat a team like us that relies on power? I thought that their team specialised in counterattacks and various other techniques to deal with opponents that rely on power…isn’t that why Rias-san and the others struggled last time?]

Ravel shook her head in response to Irina’s line of thought.

[That game was only a challenging struggle because the destruction of the field would result in a point penalty. Naturally, our opponents will also prepare various tactics to subvert our power…but only up to a certain extent. On our side, we have the fierce offensive power of Ise-sama and Bina-sama. A direct assault would blow them away.]

Ravel exposed a fearless smile as she said,

[Naturally, I also have to think about how to deal with any rules which may limit damage to the field, but if there are no restrictions in that regard — I'll plan for total destruction.]

At the time, she exuded a somewhat creepy aura. When we lost to Dulio's team…no, when we lost to Rudiger Rosenkreutz-san — Ravel gained various things, and she also cast aside various things.

So, after being transported to the battlefield…and having studied and confirmed the field's map — Ravel's eyes became filled with resolute determination.

Opening

After being transported to their destination, Sona Sitri immediately verified the state of the field. The Sitri team appeared to be located at the peak of a towering cliff. In Rating Games, it was common for teams to be transported to such locations which provided a vantage point. Sona personally disliked starting battles in such positions. After all, the more prominent their position, the easier it was for them to become a target. However, Rating Games were a form of entertainment. It was the intent of the game operators to place players in a location that was clearly visible to audience members, making it an inevitable hurdle.

Sona had a cursory look at the field map which was displayed on a table. The field was a vast plateau. There were rivers and forests, while mountain ranges stood in the northeast and southwest. The field had been divided into numerous sections according to the grid of a chess board. And so, according to the chess grid, they were currently located in the position of E8. In contrast, it appeared as though Hyoudou Issei’s team had been transported to D1. It was a rather typical set-up for the starting locations. Many of the combat plans that they had prepared in advance could probably be applied directly.

According to the information that they had been provided with, it would take nearly an hour for them to fly from one end to the opposite end — it went to show just how vast the field was. In preparation for a drawn-out battle, Sona wanted to decide on a rest base, and also capture the recovery points that should’ve been prepared for the game as soon as possible. Since the opposing side had their own means of healing, it meant that they would almost certainly move to block off any means of recovery for them. In that case, they

could lay traps there according to the combat plans that they had come up with—.

Just at that moment, Saji and the werewolf Loup Garou both seemed to notice something, and they directed their attention toward the south. Both of Saji's eyes transformed into the red eyes of Vritra, informing Sona that the Dragon King had sensed something. Just as Sona and her comrades were still in doubt—.

"Hurry up and get out of here!"

"Those guys…! Are they insane!?"

Saji and Loup Garou shouted. The expressions of both Saji and Loup Garou turned pale. Realising the abnormality of the situation, Sona took the map from the table and quickly evacuated.

"Move faster!"

Encouraged by Saji's urging, everyone escaped from that location with all their might, despite the doubts that they held. In an instant — something like a flash of light surged across from the southern end—. What appeared before Sona and the others was something with power and scale beyond all normal comprehension — a vicious torrent of black and red! It seemed that this overwhelming and anomalous destructive power had been aimed at their previous location, fired in a straight line all the way from south to north! After the release of that gargantuan cannon blast as a result of Dragon Deification — all that remained was a barren wasteland. The vast plateau had been flattened from south to north, the forests and rivers had been completely vaporised, and all that remained was a barren surface which had been exposed by a single blast.

…Hyoudou Issei’s team had once again demonstrated their ability to wreak destruction on the entire field, just like they did when they previously faced the [Lightning] team. The cannon blast that had been fired from the southern end reached the top of the northern end, obliterating everything that was once in the middle. Witnessing such a move, the [Queen] Shinra Tsubaki shuddered.

“I truly did not expect that their first move would be an unhesitant release of a Dragon Deity’s cannon blast…”

Sona also muttered,

“…I had expected that they would use this cannon blast at an early stage under certain rulesets…but this is still far too bold.”

In order to gain an immediate understanding of the damage caused, Sona ordered her [Bishop] Kusaka to activate the masks of her Artificial Sacred Gear. Kusaka scattered a vast number of masks from her location, and they began to examine the situation of the field. Shortly afterwards, she presented a bewildering truth.

“President. Hyoudou-kun’s cannon blast has destroyed the field…but it seems that the damage was not limited to just a straight line.”

Kusaka explained the situation that she had been able to observe from the sky using the laid-out map. She picked up a pen and began to draw lines—. The lines that she drew indicated that there had in fact been three cannon blasts from the south. Firstly, the linear area in columns D and E had almost been wiped clean by that bombardment. In addition, there were also traces of cannon blasts from the south to the northeast and northwest. In other words, their opponent had launched a bombardment from the south in

three directions. Hyoudou Issei had most likely directed two of his four cannons in Dragon Deification form toward the north, while the other two were aimed at the northeast and northwest when he fired.

“So this means that there are three lines on the field?”

Looking at the map, Nimura Ruruko traced her eyes over the path of the bombardments.

“However, it’s truly astounding that they have the ability to reach one end of the field from the other with a cannon blast. It’s a harsh reminder that we’re dealing with a God-class opponent.”

Yura Tsubasa’s expression was dead serious. Indeed, a cannon blast like that was an extreme threat. They had also believed that it was the thing that they had to be the most wary about with their opponent. Therefore, they had made numerous guesses on the timing with which it would be used…. Since it had been fired off right at the beginning, they were not aware of how long it would take before energy could be replenished for a second blast…they did not have any information on the current state of Hyoudou Issei’s Dragon Deification. There had been no terrorist attacks recently, which meant that [DxD] was essentially inactive, and thus no information on his capabilities had been shared. During the previous matches, perhaps due to the compatibility of opponents he was matched with, he had rarely used Dragon Deification, so they had no point of reference, especially since it was the first time that they were playing such a long match. In any case, it was impossible for him to immediately fire another cannon blast like that at present. At the very least, they were certain that he had not reached such a level with Dragon Deification.

Sona began to think about the reason why their opponents had made such a move at the beginning of the game—

—The trajectory of the first discharge should highlight the reason for their attack...

Sona looked at the map and focused on the lines which marked the cannon blast's trajectory. After considering the part of the current map that had been obliterated into nothingness — Sona arrived at a shocking conclusion.

"……!"

...What a terrifying girl — Ravel Phoenix. Rias integrates overwhelming firepower into her own strategies in order to counter her opponent's strategies. On the other hand, Ravel Phoenix uses overwhelming firepower to……!

After gaining a slight understanding of Ravel's ideology, Sona murmured,

"It looks like Ravel-san never planned to fight tactically against us from the beginning."

[—!]

Sona's revelation shocked all members of her team. The team members had all believed that Ravel Phoenix and Sona were the same kind of Devils who would follow a combat plan to corner their opponents. Precisely because of that, they believed that Ravel was the core of their opponent's team. Sona stared at the map as she said,

"She intends to completely block our plans with overwhelming firepower. In other words, she decided to create terrain that is favourable to their side."

Their opponent’s cannon blast had generated several favourable conditions for them. Kusaka suddenly cried,

“President! A large swarm of bats are flying here from the south!”

—!

...Those should be Elmenhilde Karnstein’s bats. Those are — used to survey enemy positions...no, there has to be more to it than that!

Sona took a deep breath and tried to stay calm.

.....Their first move was that powerful.

—Ravel Phoenix has not yet used Dragon Deification in an offensive capacity.

Sona was once again reminded of the decisive difference between Rias’ peerage and the Sekiryuutei’s peerage. If it was Rias, she would’ve saved a trump card like Dragon Deification for a critical moment in order to use it as a finishing move. Ravel was different. To her, a trump card was only one of many cards in her hand to be played. In order to take control of a situation, she would not hesitate to use a trump card even at the beginning.

...It seems like tricks and petty tactics won’t have much effect on Ravel Phoenix. Our opponents have not come here to ‘defeat’ us.

—They have come to ‘destroy’ us.

By following that premise, Sona began to think of a strategy to break through their immediate peril—.

Line.5 Field Break

Part 1

After being transported to the field, we followed Ravel’s instructions and began to take action. First, I entered Pseudo-Dragon Deification mode and fired off a cannon blast in three directions, leaving behind three large marks on the vast field—.

After using Infinity Blaster — the scene before my eyes had turned into a completely barren landscape! All of the forests, rivers and plains that had originally been in front of my muzzles had completely disappeared, leaving behind only a wasteland with no shelter. …Even though it was my own technique, I felt that the move was rather nefarious. However, after my cannon blast, no retirement announcements were made, indicating that my blow had not caused any actual damage to the Sitri team. However, if everything went as Ravel planned, it would impose serious limitations on them. While everyone followed Ravel’s instructions and made their individual preparations, Elmenhilde concentrated on using one of her Vampire techniques in a corner. Her red eyes glowed as she quietly mumbled,

“…The bats are in position now.”

Ravel nodded.

“I understand. Thank you, Elmenhilde-sama. Nakiri-san, how about your side?”

On another side, Nakiri appeared to be meditating while he weaved a sign with his hands, and a magic circle expanded outward from him. With his eyes still closed, Nakiri replied,

“…I’ve already linked with all of the talismans dropped by the bats. In short, I’ll be alerted to anyone who passes through the field area that Hyoudou-senpai bored out. Well, anyone in the air is outside of my jurisdiction though.”

Ravel looked at the map as she said,

“Elmenhilde-sama’s bats will continue to monitor the sky. Nakiri-san, how much longer will it take for you to locate enemies across the entire field?”

“…This field is quite vast. It may take five to six hours.”

“Please do it in five hours then.”

“Okay okay, I got it. I should also mention that the Grim Reaper is outside of my scope. I can’t tell if she’s walking or floating.”

“That’s fine. Elmenhilde-sama’s bats and other measures can deal with it.”

Ravel calmly executed the combat plan. And then, she looked toward the north.

“Bina-sama, how is the situation on your side?”

[I have just arrived at the space above the centre of the field.]

Bina-shi’s voice was heard through our transceivers. Bina-shi had already moved away and was now on standby in the

sky above the centre of the field.

“Then, please continue to follow the combat plan.”

Like that, Ravel was constantly in control of everyone’s status. Since it was possible that our offensive sub-team would have to move out at any time, each of its members relaxed in their own respective manner as they waited on standby for that moment. But…after Ravel was transported here and confirmed the map, she gave herself some time to think before informing us of the battle plan. She had started off with a rather shocking statement.

[We won’t compete with Sona-senpai on a tactical level?]

I had retorted after listening to what Ravel said. Indeed, the first thing she had said was “We will not compete against Sona-sama’s through tactics”. She then said,

[Yes, I know how diverse the plans and countermeasures prepared by Sona-sama are. I believe that she will adopt an approach of steadily cutting down our combat power. Since they cannot match us in power, they can only rely on guerrilla tactics such as hit-and-run. I do not believe that we can win against Sona-sama on a tactical level. That being the case, I’ve decided to completely overthrow all tactical foundation from the beginning.]

This was the combat plan that Ravel had come up with after arriving on the field:

First of all, I would use Dragon Deification to open fire on the field in three directions. The purpose of that was to completely obliterate all trees and rivers in those directions.

Ravel took out the map which had been marked with a grid that corresponded to a chessboard. She circled our base

location, and then drew three lines — one straight to the north, and the other two angled away. Thus, shapes resembling four right-angled triangles appeared on the map. Ravel pointed to the two right-angled triangles in the northern central sector.

[Since our opponents have evaded the cannon blast that we just fired toward the northern side, it means that they must be lurking in one of the two areas beside it. Therefore, this line — the region wiped out by Infinity Blaster will act as a boundary line. Elmenhilde-sama's bats which have been reinforced by Rossweisse-saama's magic will be positioned along that line.]

Indeed, since there had been no retirement announcements following my cannon blast, it meant that the Sitri team had to be located in one of the two right-angled triangles, either in the northeast or northwest…. Ravel continued,

[A large number of bats will be responsible for surveillance from above. If our opponent attempts to cross the boundary line and leave the central triangle, then we can detect their position. If they don't cross the boundary, and instead come directly towards us while remaining within that triangular area, then we can simply be ready to intercept them.]

Rossweisse-san said,

[If the bats are attacked…that will make it sufficiently easier for us to locate their positions…]

And since Rossweisse-san had strengthened the bats with magic, a considerable amount of power would be necessary to destroy them, thus it would be difficult for them to launch a sneak attack on the bats. Ravel glanced at Nakiri.

[Are there talismans which can be used by the bats to expand the range of Nakiri-san’s technique?]

[It’s possible, but for what?]

In response to Nakiri’s question, Ravel traced her finger across the three sides of the boundary line that I had carved out as she said,

[Please use these three lines to discern our opponent’s movements on the ground.]

Perhaps having gleamed what Ravel’s true intentions were, Nakiri rubbed his chin as he affirmed,

[—So Karnstein is responsible for surveillance from the sky, while I’m responsible for monitoring the ground. You want me to use these three lines to detect signs of activity in the area huh. And then, you also want me to put up a barrier, right?]

Ravel nodded to express her agreement with Nakiri.

[Yes. Nakiri-san, please use your technique to link those three lines. The ultimate goal is to enclose the two triangular regions in the centre, thereby sealing off our opponents’ movements.]

…It was essentially a dragnet! Moreover, my initial attack had been used to modify the terrain to transform the field into one that fit our combat plan! Ravel then said,

[In the meantime, please rest and try not to move too much, Ise-sama. As soon as the power of Dragon Deification has recovered to some extent, you’ll fire a second blast directly into the area where the Sitri team is located. It’s

precisely because of the one-day-long ruleset that we're able to implement this strategy.]

Indeed, since we had a whole day, it was possible for me to recover to some extent. With that in mind, it made sense to release my initial barrage as soon as the game began. Ravel said,

[—Our opponents have probably realised this, so they are likely to launch an attack on us before the time limit counts down. If that's the case, then there are various ways in which we can respond. And one more thing—]

Ravel pointed up at the sky.

[I would like to ask Bina-sama to stand by at the centre of the three-line boundary in the sky — this will provide us with aerial superiority and the ability to shoot our opponents down at any moment.]

[[[[[[[[[……]]]]]]]]]

Everyone held their breath as they listened quietly to Ravel's combat plan. It was a plan that focused on reducing the options available to our opponent, and kept us in control. Ravel put the map away and looked at everyone's faces as she avowed,

[Since our opponents are specialists in using their techniques to counter power, we'll use our power to obliterate their techniques — no, we'll blow all of their tactics away entirely.]

Sona-san had probably constructed a variety of tactics and traps in her mind when she analysed the map. However, Ravel chose not to confront her in a battle of wit because she knew that she would inevitably fall behind Sona-san in a

battle of tactics. Therefore, she decided to destroy the entire field before we even crossed paths in order to decimate their options. —The way that she formulated such tactics and strategies was markedly different from Rias. After listening to Ravel's strategy, even Nakiri felt somewhat terrified.

[Ooh — this is pretty chilling.]

So I unleashed Infinity Blaster and we sent out the bats… we carried everything out smoothly in accordance to Ravel's combat plan. The instructions that Ravel had given to everyone prior to today were noticeably effective. Most likely because of the special training that she had undergone to control her bats, Elmenhilde was now able to send out a large number of bats across an equally large area…but, the expression on her face seemed to indicate that it was quite a strain on her. Nakiri was meditating and concentrating on his technique…going by the earlier explanation, it would take approximately five hours to completely synchronise his mind with the central triangular area, notwithstanding the three boundary lines…. Whilst meditating, Nakiri shot a glance at me. Since it was going to be a long battle, he probably wanted a companion to chat with. So I said to him,

"Your ability sure is convenient, Nakiri. Just by being in contact with the earth, you can tell where the opponent is like sonar, right?"

"Yeah, the stronger they are, the easier it is for me to sense them through the veins of the earth. If they're close enough, I can even garner information such as the sound of their footsteps to some extent. Their footsteps reveal their current status. I can also tell if they're drilling into the ground. However, I don't think our opponents will go that far to cross the boundary."

…Ravel had probably taken all of that into consideration, which was why she asked Nakiri to monitor the ground (and underground) huh. Nakiri said,

“Among the previous successors of [Ouryuu], there were some who could absorb the life force of distant targets through the earth’s veins.”

“…That’s pretty scary.”

On the other hand, it was the ability to absorb the energy of distant targets, and thereby defeat them. While the two of us conversed with each other, Xenovia beckoned to me. I walked over and asked, “What’s up?”, and Xenovia glanced at Ravel as she asked me

“Ise, I want to ask you something. If this match was between Master Rias and Former President Sona — if we were fighting as part of Master Rias’ team, do you think the initial situation would’ve been like this?”

So that’s what she wanted to ask…. After taking a moment to think about it, I answered,

“If it was up to Rias, then she would compete directly against Sona-san with tactics. After all, having grown up together, they understand each other extremely well.”

“To think that your Dragon Deification form’s cannon blast could actually be used in such a manner…I really don’t understand how Ravel perceives our power.”

Rather than using the firepower of Dragon Deification to attack, it was used to seal off our opponents’ movements. Neither Rias nor I would have thought of that. We only would have considered it as a last resort, to use it as a finishing move. Ravel had also given instructions to Rossweisse-san.

This time, Rossweisse was a [Pawn], and her [Rook] position had been substituted by Nakiri.

“Rossweisse-sama, please intrude into our opponent’s territory once there is a timely opportunity. After promoting to [Queen], you’ll be able to use the enhanced characteristics of the [Bishop] and [Rook] to continually adapt — and position yourself to support your comrades and attack our opponents.”

“Yes, I understand.”

She intended for Rossweisse-san to promote to a [Queen] in order to improve her overall abilities.

Over the next few hours, both our team and the Sitri team maintained a potent silence—.

Around four hours had passed. A change had occurred within the field. As the ones who were responsible for monitoring our opponents’ movements, both Elmenhilde and Nakiri spoke in sequence.

“—There are several people on the eastern side crossing the central boundary into the western side.”

“I can also sense their presence and footsteps — it’s Nimura. There’s also…”

“I can also see Hanakai Momo-san and Yura Tsubasa-san.”

—Elmenhilde and Nakiri respectively reported. …In that case, Sona-san’s location, and that of her team was in the triangular area on the east side. As for their motive in moving to the western side…. I looked at the map, and what drew my attention was a certain point on the west side — a recovery point.

If they head to the recovery point, then they can heal any injuries…is someone injured? Or do they want to capture and occupy that spot?

As for Ravel — she pensively gazed out into the field as she ruminated in thought.

“…Our opponents probably have some idea of how long it will take for Nakiri-san’s technique to reach their location. After all, Shinra Tsubaki-sama of the Five Principal Clans is there, and they also have numerous team members who are well-versed in Japanese techniques. Having said that, are they really on the move just to capture the recovery point…?”

Ravel delved into silent thought for a while…and then looked up at the sky again, focusing on Bina-shi’s movements…. She then directed her gaze towards me, Irina, and Rossweisse-san.

“It’s probably a decoy or a trap set by our opponents. Since that’s the case, we should remain vigilant, and head out to investigate the situation. Ise-sama, Irina-sama, Rossweisse-sama — would the three of you please head over to Nimura-san’s location to take a look?”

Ah, we’re finally on the move now. Ravel issued further instructions.

“Ise-sama, it’s unlikely that you’ll get hurt, but please be careful. Of course, you cannot use partial Dragon Deification either. Irina-sama…please immediately use ‘that technique’. Rossweisse-sama, you are responsible for supporting both of them.”

“““Understood!”””

Ravel also said to Xenovia and Bova,

“Bova-san, please carry Xenovia-sama and fly over the area where our opponents may be lurking. Report back as soon as you discern their movements from the air.”

““Understood!””

Although it was still an approximation, I hadn’t expected that we would be able to detect the location of our opponents like this…. If I was alone, I wouldn’t have been able to think of a way to come in contact with them even if I had a map. The field had been transformed into one that was advantageous to us—. While thinking about how reliable Ravel was as my manager, servant and tactician, I departed from my location to go in search of our opponent’s team members.

Irina, Rossweisse-san and I held up a map as we cross-checked the information that we had received from Elmenhilde and Nakiri while also reporting back to Ravel. At the same time, we advanced northwest — toward a forest near C5 in terms of a chess grid. Ravel mentioned that Kusaka-san’s masks could be flying around nearby, and advised us to be careful….

“Even if there are masks, it should be impossible for them to escape the surveillance of Elmenhilde and Nakiri, right?” —When I asked that, the answer that I received was that it was possible for Nimura-san and the others to have brought some along when they crossed the boundary line. …Just like always, my manager didn’t neglect to think of even the most intricate details. Ravel believed that they had undergone a significant amount of training in regards to secrecy through their experience in dealing with terrorists.

…Although Ravel was not a member of [DxD], she had paid close attention to the Sitri peerage…. According to Ravel’s predictions, it was likely that the Sitri team were moving to the recovery point that was ahead of us. Naturally, our opponents had their own motives in moving to that location. Since the Sitri team had no inherent means of restoration, a recovery point was vital to them. While it was possible that they wanted to pre-emptively capture it, there was also a possibility that it could be used as a trap to spring an ambush on us. …Either way, Ravel had conveyed that she wanted to ‘deal with’ the recovery point.

In the forest, we reached a somewhat wider open space. — We had arrived at a location with a pond. Having vaguely detected someone’s presence, Irina looked toward the pond. Standing by the pond were — Nimura-san and Yura. And another person — Hanakai-san should also have come over to this side…but perhaps she had gone off to do something on her own, or was hiding in wait for an opportunity to present itself. Since there was something suspicious about the absence of Hanakai-san, I conveyed this to Irina and Rossweisse-san with a quick glance to confirm it with them. Nimura-san folded her arms in front of her chest and openly said

“I didn’t expect that the ones to come here would be Irina-senpai, Hyoudou-senpai and Rossweisse-chan. This is certainly above our expectations!”

She spoke with a vivacious tone. Even in the midst of a match, she was still as bubbly as usual. She then asked,

“Didn’t you guys consider that this could be a trap?”

Without trying to hide anything, I clearly retorted,

“—My manager said that even if this is a trap, she hopes that we’ll completely obliterate it.”

As she listened to me, Nimura-san fearlessly lifted the edges of her mouth to form a smile.

“Ravel-chan…she really doesn’t act like a girl our age — oh ceebs.”

Ceebs…so she meant something like ‘I can’t be bothered to think more about it’. In my opinion, of the supernatural beings who attend Kuoh Academy, Nimura-san is the one who acts the most like an ordinary high school girl.

Irina spread her Angel wings, and held Hauteclere in her hand as she pointed its tip at Nimura-san and Yura.

“Umm…this is emo, but let’s fight!”

…You don’t have to try and keep up with her high school girl casual speak, Irina.

“…Geez.”

Whilst letting out a sigh, Yura quietly manifested her Artificial Sacred Gear shield. Twinkle Aegis was a shield that could produce various defensive abilities as a result of the pact with a fairy that resided in it. It could also be thrown outward like a yo-yo.

Nimura-san had an Artificial Sacred Gear which took the form of armour on her legs. Procellarum Phantom was an Artificial Sacred Gear which could dramatically increase its user’s speed and combat strength.

I also quickly released my Balance Breaker and equipped my crimson armour. Rossweisse-san created a magic circle

and prepared for battle.

—At that moment, Nimura's aura began to swell, and then erupted with a burst at once!

"—Balance Adjust!"

As she shouted that, the form of the Artificial Sacred Gear armour on her legs changed! The shape of her armour became more ornate, and it extended to the upper half of her body as well. Armour appeared over her waist, her chest, and her arms. Nimura-san proudly made a peace sign as she declared,

"This is my Counter Balance, [Hyper Procellarum Phantom]! A 'hyper' has been added to the front!"

She was rather elated about it…the aura of the new Student Council is definitely a change from last year! While I mulled over such thoughts, the battle began. I left Yura and her shield to Rossweisse-san and Irina to deal with while I took on Nimura-san.

Perhaps as a result of her Counter Balance, Nimura-san's speed had increased even further than before, and her instantaneous speed exceeded even that of my True [Queen] form! Breathlessly and silently, she vanished from my sight and began to move around me with such speed that it was difficult to even focus on her presence. It was impossible to see her with the naked eye, and that was something which reminded me of Kiba…but since I was already used to fighting such opponents, I allowed the aura around my body to swirl — and then I unleashed it as a wide-ranged attack at once! Since I couldn't see her anyway, I decided to go with an attack that didn't require precision! I didn't think my Dragon Shots would land a hit, so I switched to attacks which affected a wide area instead! She seemed to grasp my

intentions, so she pulled away and escaped to an area outside my range. I didn’t miss that chance to instantly pursue her!

“So fast!”

From her perspective, it would have seemed as though she had just escaped a wide-ranged attack, only for me to instantly get close to her. In a contest of linear movement, I was certain that my speed wouldn’t lose to Nimura-san’s. I enveloped my right hand in aura, and thrust it at Nimura-san! However, my fist swiped through air — all of the trees close to Nimura-san’s original location were inexorably crushed by the force.

“Hiyaah!”

Having already circled around behind me, Nimura-san launched a kick toward my back! It was a good kick…but it wasn’t enough to cause me any significant damage. I immediately spun around and threw another punch! My punch went ‘zoon!’ as it rocketed through the air. The shockwave from it blew a large hole through the great tree that stood a fair distance away. Seeing this, Nimura-san couldn’t help but reveal a wry smile.

“…It feels like I’m fighting against the last boss! And the kind that has several power-ups!”

I took it as compliment of my abilities…. And then, Nimura-san issued a challenge to me.

“—Please use Dress Break. I want you to know that it won’t work on me.”

—!

…I hadn’t expected such a provocative challenge!

“That’s interesting! There’s no girl who can resist my technique!”

I decided to take her up on that challenge! Following that, I heightened the power of my perverted desires, concentrated solely on stripping Nimura-san bare, and chased my opponent in a high-speed battle with even more vigour than before! When Nimura-san instantly circled around behind me, I also demonstrated my prowess by circling behind her instead!

“When you switch on your pervert powers, the difference in your movements is like night and day!”

Although I was a little surprised, it also made me feel happy. Kuh! It looks like she’s only acting so carefree because she’s confident that I won’t catch her!

I cut out all unnecessary movements in order to attain a speed that was truly invisible to the naked eye. Eventually, I was able to completely follow Nimura-san’s movements, and found an opening during which I touched her shoulder! I immediately expanded my delusions, and released my aura!

“—Here we go, Dress Break!”

I snapped my fingers and attempted to activate my technique!

—However, Nimura-san’s eyes lit up as she declared

“I’ve been waiting for this!”

Nimura-san expelled a vast amount of aura from the armour on her legs as she began to initiate a roundhouse

kick. Since there was some distance between us, I was puzzled as to why she began a roundhouse kick there as it would simply pass through the air — but there was an audible ‘snap’ and the sound of something bursting open. After a moment, a high-pitched shriek resounded from elsewhere.

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

I turned around — and noticed that Irina’s clothes had been torn to shreds and she was naked! Ah, although I often saw it, her angelic figure still seemed perfect to me, and I could never tire of it at all! This also prompted the announcer to yell,

<<Ooh—! This situation…it appears as though Irina-senshu’s clothing has been destroyed by Hyoudou-senshu’s technique? Due to the nature of the game, there should be many children watching, so when viewer-unfriendly situations occur in a match, image processing is immediately carried out to ensure privacy. To our live audience and television audience members, I thank you for your understanding!>>

Ah, so even though the announcer had yelled out with a loud voice, the video stream was immediately processed, so it wasn’t the same as what we saw. Well, since there are children watching, you can’t let them see the image of a bare chest out in the open! To all of the fathers in the Underworld, please rest assured — I will look in your stead!

More importantly, Nimura-san stopped my Dress Break! I had definitely set Nimura-san as the target to satisfy the conditions for activation, but the instant I released the technique, Irina’s clothing was torn off! Nimura-san proudly said,

“Fufufu! Right now, I can even kick away Hyoudou-senpai’s lecherous techniques!”

On the other hand, Irina also protested to me.

“Hey, Darling! Why are you destroying my clothes!? Don’t you care if other people see your future wife’s naked body!?”

I do care, but everyone here aside from me is female, so please just let me off the hook this time! …But, my invincible and unequalled Dress Break actually failed! No, it didn’t fail. Irina’s clothing was indeed shredded apart. In other words…since my technique couldn’t possibly fail, it was deflected instead. I had seen the Balance Breaker of Nimura-san’s Artificial Sacred Gear in other matches, its Counter Balance…but I didn’t think it was capable of deflecting moves and techniques…no, it would be better to describe it as kicking such things away. The ability of Nimura-san’s Counter Balance should be to directly rebound various moves and techniques, or perhaps change their trajectory. After speculating about it, I changed my mind and declared to Nimura-san,

“Nonetheless, it would be a real blow to my reputation if I gave up now! I’m going to keep going until I get you!”

After hearing my words, the look of surprise on Nimura-san’s face was so profound that even her eyes popped out from their sockets.

“Seriously!? Your perversion really knows no ends!”

I ignored her and charged forth at high-speed in an attempt to touch Nimura-san again!

“Haa!”

Even though she occasionally kicked me, a kick of that extent was totally ineffective against me in such an aroused state!

“Got you!”

Once again, I successfully touched Nimura-san! I immediately snapped my fingers.

“Dress Break!”

Nimura-san used her legs to kick my technique away once more. After a moment, this time—

“Hey!”

Aahhh, this time Rossweisse-san’s Valkyrie outfit (Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth version) got blown awaayyyy! After Irina, Rossweisse-san’s clothes were torn apart! Her stunning proportions were as perfect as always! Thank you!

“Geez, Ise-kun!”

Even Rossweisse-san got angry! Their opponent, Yura, also scratched her head as she revealed a conflicted expression. I apologised to Rossweisse-san,

“S-Sorry! It’s just that…I feel like I’ll lose if I give up at a time like this!”

“She’s just reflecting your move! Don’t be tempted by your emotions!”

Rossweisse-san snapped back at me…. But, her ability to reflect was enough of a shock to me!

I should be saying, ‘I see, so my Dress Break can still be resisted using such a method’…. As a task for the future, I

want to improve it further.

“It’s not over! I’m not done yet!”

I reinvigorated myself and allowed my perverted delusions to run wild as I made a stance in front of Nimura-san. Nimura-san was in awe.

“You still want to continue!? Rather than describe you as persistent, I would say that you’re actually enjoying this situation!”

Alright, let’s continue. Just as that thought entered my mind, a voice was transmitted through the transceiver on my ear.

—!

…It seems like we have to move on to the next stage.

“Third time’s the charm — I really want to say that, but it seems the situation has changed.”

“?”

Nimura made a puzzled look…. I pointed up at the sky as I explained,

“It seems like you guys were planning something around the recovery point…but our tactician is pretty certain that we ‘don’t need’ that place. So—”

Just as I said that, a powerful flash illuminated the sky and *something* flew over. In an instant — and with a ‘booooooom!’, an impact powerful enough to cause tremors in the earth radiated across to us.

Both Nimura-san and Yura cast their eyes toward the direction of the recovery point. I said,

“—We’ve destroyed it. That was the work of one of our comrades who was on standby up in the sky.”

The earlier impact was caused by Bina-shi — a super-powerful demonic energy blast that Grayfia-san sent from above. As someone known to be Maou-class, a single attack was all it took for her to demolish the recovery point. However, since we didn’t hear any retirement announcements, it meant that Hanakai-san wasn’t over there. The expressions on Nimura-san and Yura’s faces instantly changed.

“Tsubasa-san!”

“I know! Let’s retreat for now!”

The two of them entered retreat mode!

—! They’re trying to flee! But I’m not going to make it that easy!

Rossweisse-san also seemed to feel the same way, so she called out to Irina,

“—Irina, now is the time!”

Upon hearing this, Irina quickly extended her hand out and traced a circle with her finger — she created a ring of light.

“That’s right! Here we go! Rings!”

Irina hurled two rings of light at Nimura-san and Yura as they attempted to flee. Both of them tried to dodge — but

the homing rings accurately changed course and landed on Nimura-san and Yura. The aim was not to hurt them, rather —. The rings went around Nimura-san and Yura's necks.

"—! What is this on our necks…there's a ring of light?"

Nimura-san reached up with her hand in an attempt to touch the ring around her neck — but Yura stopped her.

"Don't touch it, Ruruko! It's light. You'll only burn your hands if you touch it. Let's retreat for now just like this."

"Yes, Tsubasa-san."

With the rings of light around their necks, Nimura-san and Yura retreated. After the battle ended, we rested for a while. I asked Irina about the rings,

"Irina, how long does it take for those rings to activate?"

"…If I only want to tighten them, then that's already possible. But if they're going to be used for 'that purpose' then it'll take an hour or so based on our current situation."

…So it'll take more time in order to use 'that move' huh.

"I'll report back to Ravel first and tell her that we put rings on Nimura-san and Yura."

After giving Ravel an update on the situation, I returned to our base along with Irina and Rossweisse-san—.

Part 2

After the skirmish concluded, we (Irina and Rossweisse-san had already gotten dressed in their spare clothes) returned to our base. I asked Ravel,

“What do you think Nimura-san and the others were doing there?”

“They might have had a plan to use the recovery point for some kind of tactic, but since it’s been destroyed now, I think that’s ruined a few plans for them…though of course, if us destroying the recovery point was included in their plan, there’s nothing we can do.”

Hmm…there’s no way of knowing the truth since we already destroyed the recovery point. Ravel said,

“I think our opponents already anticipated the destruction of the recovery point, but in the possibility that it wasn’t destroyed, they decided to make various preparations whilst also using Nimura-san and Yura-sama as bait. I’m curious as to how the main force of their team will move.”

Nimura-san and the others were bait. They had probably planned for us to investigate in order to satiate our curiosity while the main force of their team carried out their actual goals. Ravel stopped our opponents from gaining an upper hand with surveillance from both the land and the air…. The design of Ravel’s combat plan was to ensure that all possibilities for our opponents were cut off and destroyed until nothing was left. Everything went according to her phrase ‘obliterate’.

Our opponents hadn’t moved for a while. In order to decide on our next course of action, we planned to consider the remaining time and hold another strategy meeting. However, at that moment—.

“—There’s a movement.”

“Wait, this is…”

Elmenhilde and Nakiri both reported to us that there had been some kind of reaction at the boundary. In the direction where Nakiri detected something — he stared into the distance ahead, and then revealed an indescribable, solemn expression. And at that time, in the distant sky ahead appeared black flames reminiscent of a dragon.

“Those are…black flames.”

Xenovia murmured as she gazed at the black flames which had risen up into the air. It looked as though the black flames had been released upwards from the centre of the field. —The centre. A place that had been reduced to wasteland by my cannon blast. Nakiri said to me,

“…It’s Saji-senpai.”

—Saji. …So that’s where he is.

Ravel narrowed her eyes and said,

“…I know that this indicates that Saji-sama is there, but why would he deliberately do something like that to expose his position…”

Once again, black flames soared up into the sky. I already knew what it meant. I could understand.

…It’s a calling. Saji’s calling for me. —He’s saying that he’s waiting for me in the centre.

After all, we had just recently seen the match between Sairaorg-san and Cao Cao. It was easier to understand than any other way. As a passionate fervour surged through my chest, I said to myself,

“…Yeah, I understand. Both you and I are idiots, and hopelessly so.”

I announced to Ravel,

“Ravel, I’m heading out.”

“Ise-sama?”

I pointed to the centre.

“—Saji is waiting for me there.”

It was an invitation from that guy. An invitation to a one-on-one battle—. Since he had gone to such lengths, it was unlikely that any of his team members would carelessly interfere. Ravel muttered,

“It might be a trap…but it would be insensitive for me to say that, wouldn’t it?”

“A trap huh. It might be. But, that guy is alone. He’s waiting for me there on his own — so I have to go.”

Bova inserted himself between us and told Ravel,

“Tactician-dono, this is a duel between dragons — there will be no intervention. If my lord does not accept Vrtitra-dono’s challenge, then he will carry that shame for the rest of his life. That absolutely cannot be allowed to happen!”

After listening to Bova’s heated speech about the Dragon species, Ravel simply sighed and raised no further complaints.

“…I understand. I won’t send anyone for support. But, please promise me one thing.”

“—You must win.”

“Yeah, leave it to me.”

After saying that, I left everyone else to my comrades.

…It should be foolish to do something like this. The most important member of the team, its [King], has accepted an invitation like this to go to the frontlines. Ravel has managed to organise the entire battle in a favourable manner, yet this decision of mine could make all of that for naught. But, is there any other way? I don’t have an option…! Saji’s waiting for me to appear in the centre. Knowing that, is there truly anyone who believes I have the choice to decline!? …We’re hopeless idiots. Both me and that guy. So let’s have a foolish decisive battle. What do you say, Saji—.

Line.Maximum vs Life.Maximum Dragon King (Idiot) and Dragon Emperor (Idiot)

—My name is Saji Genshirou. I’m a second year, and I am President Sitri’s [Pawn].

On my way to the centre of the field, I recalled the first time that I met Saji. I was rather happy at the time to discover that there was another [Pawn] in the same grade as me. However, in contrast to my reaction, that guy made a sigh instead.

—Actually, you’ve damaged my pride pretty badly. For you, one of the Perverted Trio, to be the same [Pawn] as me…

At the time, I thought he was really annoying. He even boasted to me about the fact that he had consumed four pieces. But, when I spoke to him about Kiba’s situation, he cried and promised to help me. I immediately knew that he was a good guy. Though, both Saji and I were disciplined by our masters after that.

When I could finally see Saji waiting for me in the distance, the words that Ravel sent me off with earlier surfaced in my mind.

[Ise-sama, to be honest…I already knew that the situation would turn out like this.]

After starting like that, she went on to say,

[Ise-sama, all members on both teams understand that both you and Saji-sama are personally committed to having

a one-on-one battle with each other. So I predicted that Sona-sama would respond in kind by allowing Saji-sama to have a one-on-one against you. As for the reason — I'm sure you're already aware of it to some extent.]

[I know. Sona-senpai — she may appear cool and calm on the surface, but she's just as affectionate with her peerage as Rias. She wants to make Saji's wish come true.]

Sona-senpai greatly valued her peerage members. I had also heard that when Saji was praised by a senior official for his performance in a Rating Game, she teared up. Ravel said,

[I once thought that one-on-one battles were much safer compared to being attacked by a large group of people — but it's actually the opposite, isn't it?]

[Of course — compared to a bunch of people attacking me, a one-on-one against that guy is way more difficult. That's what he's like. Regardless of how deeply Sona-senpai feels about this, I'm sure she's looking forward to it.]

Indeed, both he and I were the same type of Devil. If we had to work with a group of people to defeat an enemy, our motivation would actually decrease. Even if we followed a combat plan, we'd still long for a one-on-one duel in our hearts.

He had already equipped his armour. And I — also equipped my crimson armour along the way. A crimson Heavenly Dragon — confronted a jet-black Dragon King. The space between the two of us had already begun to distort under pressure, and the very air that we stood in tremored.

"I'm here, Saji."

Listening to those words, Saji's body trembled with excitement.

"…Yeah, ever since that time, I've always been looking forward to this moment."

Saji and I stared deeply into each other's eyes in our armoured forms, but the battlefield did not belong to us alone.

—Vritra spoke.

[My name is Vritra. I am a dragon hailed as one of the Dragon Kings. I request a duel with the Red Dragon Emperor, Ddraig.]

That was…an invitation to a duel. Upon hearing such words, Ddraig delivered a hearty laugh from within my body.

[…So you've given me your name, Vritra. Kukuku, it's been a long time since anyone has given their name directly in front of me. Alright, partner. We've gone past the point of no return.]

Ddraig fearlessly declared,

[—Since another dragon has given me their name, then I cannot retreat as a fellow dragon. We must fight until one of us falls!]

Ddraig's roar rang out across the sky!

[My name is Ddraig. I am a dragon hailed as one of the Heavenly Dragons. I accept the challenge of [Prison Dragon] Vritra!]

The next instant, a dense aura enveloped both of our bodies. Heat, desire, fighting spirit, hostility, passion, fervour, obsession — all kinds of emotions ran high and radiated uncontrollably from our bodies which could no longer contain them. Any further words would be meaningless. We were far past the point of exchanging words such as ‘let’s fight’ or ‘let’s begin’. The duel — the battle to destroy each other had already begun!

The moment that we raised our fists at each other…a swirling vortex of undeniable and uncontrollable emotions drew us in and ensnared us.

…Do you remember that time when I lost to you a year ago, Saji?

Ever since then, I’ve always felt….

*FRUSTRATED FRUSTRATED FRUSTRATED

—I can finally get revenge for that match. It’s as if someone’s prepared my favourite meal for me after a week of starvation…I want to pounce on it, and there’s no sanity that can stop me.

And then, both of us readied our stances and allowed a hollow silence to prevail for a moment—.

I don’t know who initiated it, but by the time I was aware—

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh!”

“Ooooooooooooooooooohhhhhhhhhh!”

We were already screaming at the top of our lungs as we charged forth, flying toward the enemy before our eyes! The initial attack — was a punch directed at each other’s faces! The impacts which crushed our helmets were transmitted directly to our heads, causing a bout of sudden dizziness…. But, we didn’t care about recovery as we mindlessly slugged it out, throwing punch after punch!

His fists slammed into my face, my fists slammed into his face, and both of us focused only on the face, face, face, face, face, face, face, face as we continuously hurled our fists at each other!

“Hyoudooooooooooouuuuuuuu!”

“Sajiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!”

Eventually, we grabbed hold of each other’s shoulders in order to cut off all routes of escape, and we continued to madly punch away at each other’s faces! We grabbed each other’s shoulders — no, we had a chokehold around each other’s necks as we constantly punched each other in the face from an extremely close distance! We endlessly threw

punches at each other’s faces! All we cared about was a nonstop barrage of punches at each other’s faces!

I launched my power-imbued fists at that guy’s face! My body had become accustomed to the repetitive motion of sending my fist into his face at the fastest possible speed! The eventual number of punches numbered in the dozens? No, more than a hundred punches…more than two hundred punches at his face. It had clearly become a fight with no purpose or sanity! The battle that began with our fists plunged into each other’s faces — continued unrelentingly in the same manner!

Watching this scene, the announcer boomed

<<WHAT IS THISSS!? WHAT KIND OF BATTLE IS THISSS!? In the centre of the field — both sides are using only their fists to punch each other in the face; it’s an almost primitive battle! The Red Dragon Emperor and the Black Dragon King! It’s as though they’ve been possessed into doing nothing more than punching each other in the face! Would you take a look at this! This back-and-forth boxing match has made all of the audience members stand up!>>

I don’t really want to imagine what my face looks like right now, but I’m certain that it looks damn manly. And that’s because the man I keep punching in front of me is getting more and more manly as well!

We continued to punch each other’s faces in order to vent our feelings of frustration! From the very moment that Saji and I met, there was already a mountain of things that we wanted to say to each other. After a year, the things that we wanted to say to each other only piled up even higher—. And now, the friendship between Saji and I had already

deepened to such a point that there was no need to say such things.

But I understand. I understand, Saji! You and I just want to punch each other's faces out, and there's not a single thing that could get in the way of that!

A reliable comrade. A despised person of the same generation. An amazing friend. An object of envy—.

With all of these feelings mixed together, all we can do is — use our clenched fists to hit each other's faces to express them. Three hundred punches…when we had exceeded four hundred punches, our noses had already become crooked, our eyes were swollen, and our mouths were full of blood. Just as the announcer said, it was as if we had been possessed to perform the singular task of continuously punching our opponent's face, face!

Finally, when we both staggered and separated — we were completely out of breath and covered in injuries. Stamina and endurance had long been forgotten amidst our frenzy. — Trivial matters such as that had long been discarded…! Whichever side collapsed first was the loser — it was plain and simple…! With swollen and bruised faces, Saji and I both grinned.

"—You look like shit, Hyoudou."

"You're one to talk, Saji. Doesn't your face look more miserable than mine?"

After laughing for a while, Saji took a deep breath. He threw a punch at my face as he shouted,

“I hate you—! No matter what I do, you’re always ahead of me!”

I also returned a punch at Saji’s face and yelled back,

“I also want to beat you down—! I’m always ahead? How dare you! Who the hell told you to crush my debut match!? That’s why I wanted to get ahead of you!”

We thrust our fists out simultaneously — it was a cross-counter as our fists jabbed each other’s faces and penetrated deeply into them! Both of us were repelled backwards, but Saji and I fixed our stances and we continued to fight whilst voicing our charged emotions!

“You shitty bastaaaaaaaaaarrrrrddd!”

“You’re the shittier bastaaaaaaaaaarrrrrddd!”

After yelling at the tops of our lungs, we — stopped caring about everything and concentrated on punching each other’s faces again! This time, I enveloped my fists in aura, and that guy also coated his fists with black flames! Even though my entire body was scorched and burnt because of the black flames…the only thing that I focused on was using my aura-coated fists to hit that guy’s face! Observing the situation, the announcer cried,

<<Absolutely unbelievable! It’s started again! A battle in which they only throw punches at each other’s faces! To think that such a method of fighting exists—!>>

As a flood of punches mercilessly smashed my face, I occasionally felt as though my consciousness was on the verge of fading…but I fought desperately to stay awake as I infused my fists with all my will and continuously hit Saji!

Nonetheless, this was still a battle between a Heavenly Dragon and a Dragon King — even an exchange of fists was sufficient to cause a tremendous impact on our surroundings. The earth shattered, and even distant trees collapsed from the shockwaves that we produced. I transformed my arm into its Solid Impact form and threw punch after punch at Saji's face. The full-powered strength of my arms was so immense that Saji could barely stand… but Saji wrapped several lines around his right arm and punched my face with his fist that was covered in black flames.

We had already long exceeded the level of inflicting severe pain on each other. We used fists with enough power to cause death against each other…. Our face-to-face punch-out finally came to an end after a countless number of punches had been thrown. I had already lost count of how many punches I had thrown, but the instant that my fist connected with Saji's face, I felt as though it had finally reached him. But even so, I continued and threw my next punch — but, my fist only caught the air. —Because Saji was already on the floor. Saji — lay on the floor and didn't move in the slightest.

<<In this battle of raging fists against each other's faces, Saji-senshu has finally fallen—!>>

The announcer thundered. …With that punch which caused his consciousness slip away, Saji…would probably disappear into the light of retirement, ending all of this. Just as I stared down at my fallen friend on the ground, a change seemed to have occurred on the broadcast side.

<<Ah—! A mysterious young girl has stolen our microphone and occupied the broadcast gallery!>>

Above the field, a projection of the situation in the stadium was shown. The person who appeared in that projection — actually turned out to be Saji's younger sister who held a microphone in the broadcast gallery.

<<Please excuse me, I am Saji Genshirou's younger sister. Please let me borrow this microphone for a moment.>>

His younger sister held the microphone and began to convey her words to Saji.

<<Gen-nii…can you hear me? In the kindergarten today, I heard the teacher say that — Gengo won a fight. He won against the boy who bullied him!>>

Tears welled up in the eyes of Saji's younger sister, and they eventually streamed down her cheeks.

<<Gengo already won! You'll look horrible if you keep lying on the ground there, Gen-nii! Stand up! Stand up, onii-chan!>>

His sister's voice resounded across the entire field. And the next moment—.

Little by little, Saji gradually began to show signs of movement, and he slowly stood up. His expression was hollow, and it didn't seem as though he had regained consciousness at all…. …Indeed, Saji should've already lost consciousness. He had already endured so many blows. Yet, in the depths of Saji's swollen eyes — a flame ignited. A grand conflagration of black flames ignited across Saji's entire body and re-formed his armour. Watching the scene before my eyes, the words of Saji's sister surfaced in my mind.

—I think Gen-nii wants Gengo to see the path that mum and dad used to walk in life.

—I think Gen-nii is trying to act cool to make up for the roles of both mum and dad.

…Saji, I see. That’s right. You want to show them. You want your little sister to see your cool side, and you also want your little brother to see it in the future as well!

—Hyoudou, I want to become a teacher.

…I get it, I understand, I know, Saji. That’s right…both you and I have our ambitions…our dreams, and we’ve come all the way to the present with them. Moreover — you have family that you must protect. That’s why there’s no way you can just fall down in this place, right!? At that moment, I heard Vritra’s voice

[…I see, so you’ll stand up, my avatar. Even if your consciousness is blurred, you’re still an Evil Dragon. That being the case, you should take a good look, Sekiryuutei! Hyoudou Issei and Ddraig!]

Vritra’s roar echoed through the sky. The cold-mannered Vritra unveiled his emotions.

[We are Evil Dragons! Even if half our bodies are destroyed, and even if we fall unconscious! We will rely on obsession, and act upon that singular purpose! We are strong enough to stand in the way of a Heavenly Dragon!]

Black flames and aura like none I had ever seen before billowed all over Saji’s body. Seeing his appearance, I made up my mind and strengthened my resolve.

“…Yeah, I know. It’s just as you say. You…that’s who you two are.”

I spoke to Ravel through the transceiver on my ear.

“Ravel, can you hear me?”

[Yes, go ahead.]

“I’m going to apologise in advance — I’m going to use [Dragon Deification], even though we might need it in the second half of the match.”

[—!]

Ravel was momentarily surprised, but she immediately understood the situation.

[…This is what you have to do to settle things with Saji-sama, right?]

“…I’m sorry for being the same foolish [King] as always. Since I’ve already fought this far with him, I have to accompany him until the end. I have to do this…!”

—I won’t back down. I can’t possibly back down! …If I back down here, I won’t be able to face Saji and Sairaorg-san with pride! If I don’t take everything that he has to give me, then I won’t be able to call myself his ‘friend’!

[I understand. I’m only by your side because you’re the type of person who would face something like this seriously, Ise-sama.]

Ravel accepted my resolve.

“Thank you, Ravel.”

After thanking Ravel and terminating the communication channel, I said to Ddraig,

“Well, with that done, it looks like real fight is just about to begin. Let’s go, Ddraig.”

[Kukuku, this is nothing. Aren’t things always like this? I understand.]

Ddraig truly seemed happy. It seemed like Ddraig had also enjoyed this duel between dragons to its fullest.

“So Ddraig, if I use partial Dragon Deification now, how many moves can I make?”

[Since you haven’t fully recovered, it won’t be possible to do too much. At worst, just a single move will—]

“Lend me your support! No, let’s do this together! This is the only way left to defeat those two! There’s no other way to pierce through their obsession!”

Saji had already readied his fists in preparation for a second round.

Alright, sorry for making you wait, Saji. Shall we fight again? Shall we clash again? This is the only option we have. This is the only way in which we can express these feelings —

“Come, Sajiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii——!”

I charged straight ahead.

“Gaaaaaaaaahhhhh! Hyoudooooooooouuuuuu——!”

Even on the verge of losing consciousness again, Saji also rushed toward me! Even if everyone else is tired of

watching, we’re going to start punching each other in the face again! Anything other than that has become meaningless. Any other kind of attack is no longer possible for us! Saji entwined a large number of lines around his hands, and he raised both his aura and flames to their maximum! His strengthened fists made me feel intense pain and heat across my entire body! Ddraig couldn’t help but grumble,

[He can still produce that many lines…!? He’s so damn persistent!]

In order to decide everything with a finishing blow, I began to recite the chant.

[The jet-black God of Infinity! The glorious God of Dreams! Watch over the forbidden existence we shall become that transcends the boundaries—!]

“[<<Dragon ∞ Drive !!!!!!>>]”

My right arm partially transformed into its Dragon Deification mode!

“I won’t lose to yooooooooooouuuuuuu!”

With my Dragon Deified fist, I smashed Saji’s face! The instant I landed that hit, Saji stopped moving. The impact of that blow severely damaged the ground and dug out a crater.

“…President…So…”

Having received my single Dragon Deified blow, Saji stepped back unsteadily. Step by step, he slowly receded away from me. Saji murmured as if in a trance,

“…I made a promise with everyone…I’m going to become a teacher…with President……Kaho…Gengo…”

After saying that, Saji stood still. And then—

“…I’ll…do mum and dad’s part as well……I…I…!”

For the third time, black flames ignited and erupted around his body—

“—I’m going to become a teacher!”

Black aura continued to discharge from his body as he shouted toward the sky. …All I could say was that it was breathtaking. Saji’s strength should’ve already reached its limits. His consciousness was also hazy and clearly not in a normal state. He probably couldn’t even feel pain.

But even so, you’re still…

Ddraig said,

[…I see, it’s obsession. A human’s obsession can be described as the most frightening thing…it’s been a long time since I’ve been exposed to such obsession. Even after reincarnating as a Devil, his will has remained so strong because he still retains the spirituality of being human.]

…Yeah, Saji is an incredibly human guy. That’s why I’m fond of him.

[—The next [Dragon Deification] will be the last! How do you want to use it, partner!?]

Ddraig asked, but my answer had already been prepared! Anything else was impossible!

“It’s obviously going to be a punch—!”

I once again partially transformed my fist into Dragon Deification mode — and hit Saji with it! Covered in black flames, Saji's fist could be described as a punch that represented all of his spirit — and he used that to strike me first. My consciousness almost left me, but I just barely managed to hold on, and — when it was the turn for my Dragon Deified fist to hit Saji, he was launched backwards with immense force. As I looked at Saji on the ground, I thought that he wouldn't be able to get back up again—

"…H-Hyou…dou…"

—!

…Saji…moved again. He was that strong. Are you that obsessed with me…!? Seeing this, even the announcer's voice trembled.

<<He's gotten back up again. Saji-senshu has stood up again! Such incredibly persistence! Not a single person in the audience can say a word! What motivation does he have to resist to such an extent!?>>

In the projection above the field, Saji's little sister could be seen in tears near the broadcast gallery. In an attempt to get back up, Saji collapsed. He tried to stand up again, and collapsed. After falling several times, Saji finally stood up… but his knees didn't stop shaking, and his eyes were unfocused.

…Saji is already—. But, that's fine. You…that's just like you. Even though it was already over, that man of the same generation, my friend, Saji Genshirou still—.

Suddenly, a black snake appeared by his side — Vritra had summoned his body in a miniature form. Vritra — couldn't stop tears from overflowing from his eyes.

[…Finish it…deal my avatar the final blow…he has nothing left. He has already exhausted everything. He can't even ignite a small ember…but even so, my avatar won't stop.]

Just as Vritra said, Saji moved forward and approached me, step by step. Even though he no longer had the capacity to fight and was unconscious, Saji — Saji still…just wanted to defeat me…! Watching this, Vritra pleaded,

[…Please help…personally deliver the final blow as his friend, Sekiryuutei…]

I…tightly clenched my fist and stood in front of Saji. Saji reflexively raised his fists…and then slowly punched me. He was no longer capable of exerting any power through his fists.

"…Hyoudou…President Sona…everyone…Kaho, Gengo…"

I hugged Saji, and delivered the final punch to his abdomen. It was a quiet conclusion to the battle—. Saji's body shook for a moment, and then his arms finally dropped down, limp and weak. I hugged Saji tightly…as tears overflowed from my eyes—.

"Saji…"

Despite Saji's swollen and bruised face — he smiled. After exhausting all of his strength, his smile conveyed a sense of satisfaction despite his defeat. In my arms, my friend spoke with a voice that only I could hear.

—Thank you.

After leaving those words behind, Saji's body faded into the light of retirement as he gradually disappeared.

“Saji…”

Up until the final moment, I continued to hold onto my friend tightly.

“…You idiot…that’s what I should be saying to you…”

Even after Saji’s body disappeared and our battle was over, I — still couldn’t stop my tears from flowing.

Final Line. The Student Council and Leviathan

After witnessing the intense battle between Ise-kun and Saji-kun, I — Kiba Yuuto, watched the remainder of the Rating Game in the viewing lounge of the stadium. After losing Saji-kun, who was the only team member they had to fight against Ise-kun, the Sitri team's defeat seemed inevitable, and there wasn't much point in continuing to hide. Perhaps because of that, the Sitri team members started to move again. The remaining members of the Sitri team began to advance toward Ise-kun's base, and battles unfolded all over the place.

In the viewing lounge, Rias Gremory's team and Seekvaira Agares-san's team were present. Rias-neesan and Seekvaira-san both focused their attention on the methods that Sona-senpai employed to equalise the overwhelming difference in power…. However, the Sitri team's capabilities in the match had been crippled by the execution of Ravel-san's combat plan from the very beginning…since her strategy had given their team dominance over the situation, the room became eerily silent as the battle developed into an almost one-sided take down. Both Rias-neesan and Seekvaira-san maintained solemn expressions, and neither of them had uttered a word until now. Whilst waiting for our masters to open a conversation, we continued to watch the battle unfold on the screen.

Fighting on a rocky plateau was — Loup Garou-san who had transformed into a Werewolf, and his opponent was the Vampire Elmenhilde-san! Loup Garou-san was able to use powerful magic attacks, coupled with the strong physical abilities of a Werewolf, making it difficult for Elmenhilde-san

to put up significant resistance. Elmenhilde-san used bats and various familiars to neutralise Loup Garou-san's attacks, but such a method had limitations. Even though she tried to inflict damage upon Loup Garou-san, only an extremely strong Vampire was capable of surpassing the resistance and regenerative abilities of a Werewolf. It appeared as though Loup Garou-san had also used magic to improve his physical abilities further. Thus, it was impossible for Elmenhilde-san to land any effective blows on him. Eventually, Elmenhilde-san was chased into a dead-end cliff from which there was no escape.

[Daughter of the Karnstein House, the power that you have demonstrated exceeded my expectations — but it is time to put an end to this.]

Loup Garou-san raised his arms which had been strengthened by magic, and looked ready to deal the finishing blow. However, even with no chance of escape, Elmenhilde-san revealed a fearless smile.

[…No, the show is just about to begin. I think it's time I also reveal the ace up my sleeve.]

Elmenhilde-san began to create several small magic circles beside her! What appeared from them were — silver dolls which were about fifteen centimetres tall! Those dolls… their appearance was slightly reminiscent of a robot….

[—Dolls?]

Loup Garou-san was clearly also doubtful of the move that Elmenhilde-san had just made. At that moment, in the midst of watching the game, Seekvaira Agares-san suddenly stood up. Her expression — was coloured by astonishment. With a trembling voice, she said,

“…Elmenhilde-san, you…don’t tell me!”

On the screen, Elmenhilde-san gave orders to the silver dolls!

[Go, my soldiers!]

The silver dolls began to move as if they had wills of their own, and they lifted the sabres and guns in their hands as they began to attack Loup Garou-san! After Loup Garou-san was cut by one of the sabres, he was startled by the fact that smoke began to rise from his wound! And at the same time, his expression shows signs of agony.

[That is — made of silver!]

Loup Garou-san yelled. As the dolls let loose a hail of bullets at Loup Garou-san, they did indeed inflict damage upon him despite their small size. Dolls made of silver! Even I felt surprised by that development. It was unquestionably true that silver could cause damage to Werewolves. Elmenhilde-san evinced her amusement with a smile as she affirmed,

[Indeed, for us non-humans, silver is one of the things that we must avoid. Especially for you beast-men — it is a highly toxic metal to Werewolves. I don’t have any problems when using silver since I can mould it into human forms like this, and I don’t need to directly touch them when I manipulate them with my powers.]

As she watched Elmenhilde-san switch from defence to offence, Seekvaira-san quietly muttered,

“Those silver dolls…they’ve clearly got the appearance of Gundams! Moreover, based on the way that they attack, it seems their design has been influenced by the latest work

[Iron-Boned Dolphins]! They don’t use beam weapons in that work, instead, they fight with physical attacks and old-fashioned heavy artillery!”

Seekvaira-san’s mutterings swiftly increased in rapidity. Rias-neesan and Akeno-san were unable to understand Seekvaira-san’s self-mutterings, and simply looked puzzled by her behaviour. Seekvaira-san lifted her head and stared at the ceiling, seemingly in regret.

“Having said that, silver Gundams huh…how could I have not thought of such a possibility? It’s not entirely unreasonable. After all, Gundam figures made of metal alloy are—”

As she covered her face with both hands, it seemed as though even she had gotten lost in her own words…. Under such circumstances, the [Queen] of the Agares peerage, Alivian-san, weakly smiled as he said,

“I’m sorry. Seekvaira-sama’s mind is already in the clouds…so please don’t mind her and continue to enjoy the match.”

That was one of the interludes which occurred in the viewing room…. Rias-neesan expressed with seriousness,

“…It’s not just Ise and Seekvaira, but even Elmenhilde has become so passionate…[Gundam] huh, I feel like I’m starting to get interested in it.”

“…I like the [First Generation], [M] and [QQ].”

Koneko-chan calmly replied as if everything was normal.

“In order to get closer to my husband, I suppose I should also look into it…”

Even Akeno-san placed her hand on her chin as she gave the matter some serious thought. …Ah, has Seekvaira-san's influence affected even Rias-neesan and the others? I had a hunch that this would soon spread to all members of [DxD].

Whilst that happened in the viewing room, the other screens broadcast a stream of the other battles. The Sitri team's [Knight] Bennia-san was engaged in battle with Bova-san from Ise-kun's team. With the swift and light movements of a Grim Reaper, Bennia-san completely out-dodged Bova-san's fiery breath.

[Fufufu, such crude attacks won't be able to hit me.]

[Grrr! You impudent little girl!]

Bennia-san's agile movements only served to annoy and frustrate Bova-san. It seemed that Bennia-san had good compatibility against her opponent.

On another screen, the Sitri team's new member — (a crying) Hoderi-kun fought against Irina-san.

[Angel-oneesan! Since you're an Angel, can't you hold back a bit!?]

[I won't! This is a trial for you! I will guide you in place of Heaven! Amen!]

Hoderi-kun looked a bit unreceptive, but since he was able to fight head-on with Irina-san even though he was still just in middle school, he had promising potential as a swordsman.

I looked at the battle on another screen — Ravel-san and Asia-san had been chased and cornered by Shinra-senpai! They had already retreated to a forest near their base, and

Ravel-san spread her fiery wings to protect Asia-san as she confronted Shinra-senpai. Shinra-senpai held a blade in her hand as she prepared to activate her Balance Breaker [Nostalgia Mad Tea Party] to produce a large mirror. The fact that it had become possible meant that she had already satisfied the conditions to activate her Balance Breaker. If demons appeared from her mirror, the chances of Ravel-san or Asia-san prevailing would become immeasurably slim. After all, those demons had powerful special abilities and they also had a large area of effect. However, Ravel-san tried to stay calm as she produced an item from her pocket — it was a thin object. It appeared to be a thin book that had a colour illustration on its cover. Ravel-san presented the thin book in her hand by holding it up in front of Shinra-senpai as she said,

[—You should be quite familiar with this, right?]

Shinra-senpai adjusted her glasses as she cast a doubtful glance at the item…. However, she was instantly shocked and overwhelmed!

[—What!? T-T-T-T-T-T-T-T-T-T-That can’t possibly be, that’s…! It’s not possible…!]

She pointed at the book and her body shuddered as if she had seen something far beyond the realm of her belief. Ravel flashed a victorious smile as she explained,

[This is your masterpiece, Shinra Tsubaki-sama — the super rare doujinshi novel that is privately circulated throughout Kuoh Academy. Only five were ever printed, and it’s a work that only insiders know about — ‘Kuoh-style Shinra Universe — Ki x Iss (*Read as:* High School KxI)’.]

Shinra-senpai — quivered with such intensity that even her face grew pale! Upon hearing Ravel-san say that, I was

reminded that a short while ago, she directly apologised to both me and Ise-kun.

[I have to apologise to both of you beforehand, Ise-sama and Kiba-sama.]

After saying that, Ravel-san bowed to both me and Ise-kun. She looked so apologetic that Ise-kun and I just stared at each other, unsure of what to say or do.

[Apologise? To me…and Kiba?]

[Could this perhaps be related to your match against the Sitri team?]

Ise-kun and I had asked. She nodded.

[Yes, if anything goes wrong, it may hurt the friendship between the two of you…]

Facing Ravel-san whose voice had become soft, Ise-kun smiled and said,

[Well, no matter what happens, the friendship between Kiba and I should be unbreakable…we may belong to different teams in the Tournament, but I don’t think that’ll cause us to stop getting along with each other.]

[Well, the fact that we’re both part of the Gremory peerage won’t change either. But despite knowing this, you still want to apologise to us, is that right?]

In response to my question—

[Yes.]

She replied and nodded….

Ravel-san faced Shinra-senpai and opened the book. Shinra-senpai's unease was so apparent and plain that it looked like she was on the verge of tears.

[What!? What are you planning to do by opening that book!? N-No, you wouldn't! You! You're not the kind of person who would do something like that, right…?]

While Shinra-senpai's entire body trembled, Ravel-san took a deep breath and then gazed down at the book to begin reading it out.

[…"It was a moment of reversal. The boy who was often called a Beast made a lustful expression in front of the number one Prince of the Academy — Kiba Yuuto. The Beast — Hyoudou Issei's pleading eyes stimulated the Prince's sadistic heart. 'It looks you need me to give you some punishment'…Kiba Yuuto lifted the corner of his mouth"…]

[—Stop…]

It was as if something had snapped within Shinra-senpai. She dropped the blade down on the spot, and even the mirrors that she had manifested with her Sacred Gear disappeared.

[Stooooooooopppppp itttttt!]

And then, she cried as she lunged toward Ravel-san in an attempt to snatch the book away. Ravel-san evaded simply by shifting her body to one side, and she continued to read out the contents of the book.

["Come hither, my adorable Beast-san. You're a wild one, but you're like a spoilt bitch now". "Saying that, the Prince traced his slender fingers down Hyoudou Issei's body, undoing his shirt buttons one by one".]

Shinra-senpai instantly fell to the ground and covered her reddened face with both hands due to her immense embarrassment.

[I’m going to die! My heart! My—…uwaahhh!]

Yet, Ravel-san mercilessly continued to read from the book.

[“Oh, my wild Beast-san. Cry out with that cute voice of yours. Tonight, I’m going to infuse my holy-demonic essence into your body”. “Ahh, Gram…!”]

[Noooooooooooooooooooo!]

A harsh screech echoed and rebounded through the forest from Shinra-senpai, who had lost the will to fight—. The content of that book seemed to be about me and Ise-kun…a-about this and that….

Hahaha, I’m really not sure how I should react. But, creativity is a personal freedom, so I don’t feel that I have the right to make say anything about Shinra-senpai’s creation. However, if Ise-kun doesn’t like it, then I may have to think about it….

Ravel-san’s attack (?) stunned even Rias-neesan.

“How terrifying. Ravel Phoenix’s method of defeating her opponents is very thorough…”

Beads of cold sweat also slid down Koneko-chan’s cheek.

“…When that girl Ravel becomes an enemy, she’ll be more terrifying than anyone else.”

Even though they had lost Saji-kun, the Sitri team struggled desperately to turn the situation around, but Ise-kun's team fought extremely well with their unique ability to deal with their opponents without actually attacking them. Well, since their unfavourable situation hasn't changed, what will the Sitri team's next move be?

Just as I continued to watch the battles, one particular screen suddenly emitted a dazzling flash that caught my attention. Looking closer, Bina Lessthan-san who had been on standby in the sky gathered an enormous amount of demonic energy in her hands. Bina-san enveloped herself in a vast swathe of aura that seemed to defy all logic—.

Such a tremendous volume of aura…that quality and quantity definitely belonged to an Ultimate-class Devil…no, it was even further beyond that level. Just as everyone focused on Bina-san who was in mid-air to see how she would utilise that vast amount of aura…a pillar of light shot up from a corner of the field. As soon as Bina-san confirmed that column of light — she unleashed a massive demonic energy attack there! After a momentary flash — in the next scene, the corner of the field from which a column of light originally appeared had been eradicated! Although it wasn't on the same level as Ise-kun's Dragon Deification, it was still enough power to completely annihilate a vast region of the field…!

<<One [Rook] of the [Sona Sitri] team has retired.>>

An announcement reporting the retirement of a player was made. A retiree other than Saji-kun from the Sitri side had finally occurred. On the screen, a replay of Bina-san's elimination of her opponent was shown. The Sitri team's [Rook] Yura-san was originally fighting against Nakiri-kun, when all of a sudden, a blinding luminescence radiated from

the ring of light around her neck. Upon seeing that, Nakiri-kun retreated, and Bina-san's powerful blast of demonic energy crashed down on that spot to eliminate Yura-san who was unable to do a thing. Rias-neesan said,

"It's begun…what comes next will be one-sided devastation."

Akeno-san followed with

"…So the reason why Bina-sama concentrated her demonic energy in the sky was for this very purpose. The moment that Irina-chan's rings of light were attached to the Sitri team members, this was already—"

…The reason why Bina-san waited up in the sky wasn't just to obtain aerial superiority; it was also so that she could concentrate her demonic energy for this purpose…. Once the time was ripe, Irina-san could activate her technique to cause the rings to emit strong light, and Bina-san would attack. Given the intensity of that light, their locations would instantly be given away to anyone monitoring from the sky.

<<One [Pawn] of the [Sona Sitri] team has retired.>>

Another retirement announcement was made. Just like Yura-san, Nimura Ruruko-san who also had a ring of light around her neck was blown away by Bina-san. …To even think of such a tactic, Ravel-san's planning is phenomenal…! Rias-neesan said,

"Before the game began, Ravel privately declared to me 'I think that we probably won't lose to the Sitri team'."

"Probably? Won't lose?"

Rias-neesan answered my doubts.

“I think the reason why she added a ‘probably’ is because if the chosen ruleset was the similar to the [Rampage Ball] that they participated in last time, it’d be harder to assure themselves of victory. But, that girl felt from the start that they would win. A part of it is because she had prepared such a combat plan, but she also said this with conviction…”

—As long as Ise-sama and Bina-sama are in this team, it is impossible for us to lose unless we make a careless mistake.

Ravel-san had apparently said. Rias-neesan narrowed her eyes and said,

“…Ise and Bina Lessthan both have power that could be categorised as Maou-class or even better. In order to face them, the Sitri team can’t compete with raw power, so they’ll use various tactics and Saji to suppress Ise. But such methods still won’t work. Although Ise is indeed strong, the entire roster of the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team is like a gathering of strong fighters. With Ise and Rossweisse who are both capable of strengthening their team members, they’re even more formidable. Most importantly, the person directing the team is—”

—Ravel Phoenix.

…As she was almost able to achieve victory against a team that was supervised by Rudiger Rosenkreutz-shi, she had gained recognition not only in the Underworld, but also in other factions. Moreover, in this match, she had fully utilised Ise-kun’s power.

“The moment that a general ruleset like this was chosen, Ravel has calmly continued to execute a strategy to checkmate her opponent.”

After listening to Rias-neesan’s view, Seekvaira-san nodded in agreement.

“Based on the over-the-top first move and the methods that followed, it’s quite clear to see.”

Rias-neesan then declared,

[—Sona was checkmated a long time ago. Especially after Saji, the only one who could defeat Ise was taken down; the defeat of their team has almost been guaranteed. As things are now, it’s just a matter of seeing who will be the one to finish her off.]

Just as Rias-neesan said, one of the screens showed a scene in which Sona-senpai already had nowhere left to escape. The area of the field on-screen had a pond that was different from the one that Ise-kun and the others fought at earlier. Sona-senpai was there — in a confrontation with Xenovia. Xenovia gripped the swords Durandal and Excalibur in her hands. Sona-senpai said to Xenovia,

[This match is your victory.]

Sona-senpai herself clearly acknowledged their defeat.

[…Do you admit defeat?]

Pressed by Xenovia’s question, Sona-senpai replied,

[Yes, we will continue fighting until the end in principle, but we have already been defeated. With the field destroyed, your team was easily able to locate us and attack from above. Given that, the only thing we could do was bet everything on the duel between Saji and Ise-kun.]

Even when talking about her own defeat, Sona-senpai remained calm.

[We adopted a variety of strategies…but even those strategies were blocked off by Ravel-san. And then, Saji lost to Ise-kun…even though Ise-kun’s power has been exhausted, Bina Lessthan-san is still present — that’s why it’s checkmate for us.]

[So the Sitri team changed its strategy early on and decided to bet everything on Saji’s one-on-one challenge?]

[Yes. After we learned of Ise-kun’s powerful cannon blast, as well as the cooperation between Elmenhilde-san and Nakiri-kun, the situation already became difficult for us. And after seeing Bina Lessthan-san up in the sky, it came down to a matter of how many moves it would take before we were cornered.]

Sona-senpai narrowed her eyes and sighed.

[—Ravel-san checkmated us without even fighting against me. She truly is a terrifying girl.]

Despite the negative tone in her words, Sona-senpai still enhanced her own demonic energy. An aqua blue aura began to cover Sona-senpai’s entire body.

[But, losing like this would be unfair to all of those who have been eliminated — at the very least, I’ll take you down.]

Sona-senpai’s eyes radiated a strange light, and a change began to occur in the nearby pond. The water in the pond swelled and floated up into the air. Under the control of Sona-senpai’s demonic energy, the water from the pond gradually morphed into a certain form. What appeared there

was an enormous — serpent-dragon composed of water which was nearly ten metres long! Aside from that, Sona-senpai also used her demonic energy to create more than ten hawks, several colossal lions, and an endless pack of wolves from water. Although Xenovia was surprised by this, she still raised her swords and said to Sona-senpai,

[I really wanted to converse with you through battle, and now the stage has been set for this confrontation.]

Sona-senpai asked,

[You want to fight against me? And have a conversation as well? Is this…about the position of Student Council President?]

Xenovia immediately shook her head.

[It’s precisely because I’ve become the Student Council President that I want to learn the path that the Former Student Council President travelled based on your fighting style, way of life, and so on.]

Xenovia’s frank and direct words instantly left Sona-senpai stunned for a moment…but she then smiled with joy.

[Ufufufu…geez, that certainly is very characteristic of you, Xenovia. Rather than have a conversation, you want to learn through a battle…I see, so this is the current Student Council President.]

Sona-senpai halted her laughter and her expression immediately turned cold as she glared at Xenovia. After deploying her water dragon and an army of beasts, Sona-senpai said,

[Very well. If that’s the case, then I’ll tell you what being the Student Council President is all about — through this water dragon, Leviathan, and these beasts…I’ve also been training, you know?]

Sona-senpai raised her hand to give instructions, and the water dragon — Leviathan and the beasts hurtled toward Xenovia! Xenovia dodged to the side and swung one of her swords to fire off a holy wave at Leviathan and the beasts, but her wave passed straight through their bodies. The water dragon opened its mouth and spat out a countless number of compressed needle-like objects! They were probably water needles which had been compressed and hardened with demonic energy. Xenovia used her holy swords to deflect the attacks, but she was not able to completely defend against all of them, and many water needles pierced through her body. She tried to eliminate the water needles, but since they were originally water, they splattered onto the ground as soon as the demonic energy in them dissipated. Xenovia enhanced Durandal’s aggressive holy aura and unleashed it as a massive holy wave. The dragon and beasts that had been formed from water were not able to withstand the attack, and they returned to the ground as water when the demonic energy that powered them was lost. However, Sona-senpai immediately channelled demonic energy into the pond, re-creating Leviathan and the army of beasts. Sona-senpai said,

[Let us have a contest then. Will you run out of stamina first? Or will I exhaust my demonic energy first?]

What came next was a drawn-out battle between Sona-senpai who skilfully manipulated water and Xenovia who was unable to land a decisive blow. Amidst their battle, there were also frequent announcements of the other members of the Sitri team retiring. But even so, Sona-senpai

continued to use her demonic energy to direct water attacks at Xenovia. So long as the pond of water existed, it was not too taxing on Sona-senpai to use it for offence. On the other hand, the more Xenovia continued to fight and defend, the more she exhausted both her physical strength and stamina. Xenovia had already consumed a significant amount of stamina, and she began to breathe heavily as her shoulders heaved up and down. Sona-senpai gradually increased the number of beasts that she created, and Xenovia's ability to respond gradually slipped. It seemed as though Sona-senpai planned to defeat Xenovia purely with numbers.

Eventually, a countless number of water beasts completely surrounded Xenovia. The beasts which Sona-senpai controlled were not limited to simple movements such as charging ahead — each and every one of them were products of intricate demonic energy control which could alter their movements according to Xenovia's attacks. Since some of the beasts even used feints, Xenovia was constantly at her wits' end. The water dragon — Leviathan also expelled powerful stakes of compressed water from its mouth, and the vast number of those sharp water stakes stabbed into the area where they were fighting. The trees, ground and rocks were all pierced through by them with ease. Without any armour, Xenovia would not last long if she took a direct hit.

…So Sona-senpai is also capable of using such powerful attacks to cover a wide area. Moreover, since the only constituent required is water, so long as her demonic energy isn't exhausted and there's water present, she's capable of doing almost anything. Even if her water forms are destroyed by Xenovia's holy sword, she can easily give shape to the water and attack again. Sona-senpai's level of demonic energy control with water was so precise that everyone in the viewing room was left speechless. But even

under such circumstances, Xenovia panted as she asked Sona-senpai,

[What is the Student Council to you…?]

Sona-senpai used the water beasts to encircle Xenovia as she answered,

[It’s a place for realising my dreams and the dreams of my servants, and it’s also a place for me to learn more about schools and students. At the same time, it’s a place for me to deepen my bonds with the people who are there every day — as the Student Council President, I’ve gained a deeper insight into what a ‘school’ is.]

After listening to Sona-senpai’s response, Xenovia looked deeply touched.

[…I see, you certainly are remarkable. You’re far better than me. But, I also want you to listen to my thoughts.]

[Yes, do tell.]

Xenovia bluntly said,

[To me, the Student Council — no, Kuoh Academy itself is filled with things that bring joy and fun. Everything that I’ve experienced there is like a dream, and it’s the best place! And because it’s the best place to me, I want to make it so that all of its students think it’s the best place as well — I want to protect the smiles of everyone who is enrolled at Kuoh Academy! That is why the Student Council exists, and that is why I became the Student Council President!]

Xenovia yelled towards the sky!

[—I want to turn Kuoh Academy into a place that will make everyone happy!]

Although Sona-senpai was initially taken by surprise by Xenovia's words, she immediately exposed a soft smile. The way that Xenovia conveyed her thoughts and feelings to Sona-senpai was a show of her determination.

[Former President Sona, compared to you, I might only have the intelligence of a small animal. But, I have my own way of doing things!]

Xenovia heightened the auras of Durandal and Excalibur to their maximum, and then prepared her stance to unleash that ultimate move! It was Xenovia's ultimate technique which involved using two holy swords to form a cross.

Is she planning to use that move to get rid of Sona-senpai's water dragon and beasts? But, even if she can temporarily eliminate them, Sona-senpai can use a small amount of demonic energy to re-create Leviathan and those beasts.

Xenovia raised the crossed holy swords up into the air — and actually targeted the pond!

[Cross x Crisis—!]

Durandal and Excalibur — the immense holy wave generated by crossing those two legendary swords against each other surged towards the pond of water! After the holy wave subsided — what appeared on screen was the scene in which the entire body of water had disappeared without a trace! A vast crater remained in the location, and not a single drop of water! At the same time, the water dragon and all of the beasts which had surrounded Xenovia disappeared!

[…What!? You directly destroyed the water source…!]

Sona-senpai was at a loss for words following the release of Xenovia's technique. Sona-senpai had lost the water dragon, the beasts, and even her water source — Xenovia used that opportunity to close their distance and launch an attack! Even without water, Sona-senpai used her innate demonic energy to attack, but Xenovia deflected those attacks with her holy swords! When it came down to physical ability, Sona-senpai was not a match for Xenovia.

[I'm going to defeat you, Former President Sona!]

After effortlessly shattering the defensive magic circle that Sona-senpai had erected in front of her, Xenovia used that opportunity to land a direct front slash on Sona-senpai! Having received a fatal injury, Sona-senpai — began to fade into the light of retirement.

[…So this is the Student Council President of the new generation…]

Leaving behind those words, the [King] of the Sitri team looked satisfied as she disappeared into the light of retirement—. Not long after, an announcement was made.

<<The [King] of the [Sona Sitri] team has retired.>>

Having witnessed the scene, Rias-neesan closed her eyes and whispered,

"…It was a good match, Saji, Sona."

An announcement of the victor was then broadcast throughout the field and the venue.

<<The winner is — the [Sekiryuutei of Blazing Truth] team!>>

—Ise-kun and the others had grasped victory.

After the match concluded, our Gremory team left the viewing room. We began to converse as we walked through the corridor.

“…Koneko, that girl from your generation is quite the outrageous one.”

“…Rias-oneesama, I already know that. That girl, Ravel always sees things from a different perspective.”

Koneko-chan spoke with a deeply serious expression.

“Ravel is a monster. As far as combat is concerned, when she’s paired up with Ise-senpai, she has a different kind of combat strength compared to when Rias-oneesama is paired up with Ise-senpai.”

Listening to Koneko-chan who didn’t usually make such remarks, Rias-neesan revealed a fearless smile.

“Fufufu, that’s very forthcoming of you. In that case — as expected, we must prepare a monster even more fearsome than her.”

Not long after this, Rias-neesan successfully persuaded His Eminence Vasco Strada, the man known as [The Violence of Heaven], to join our team.

New Line

A few days after the battle against the Sitri team—.

Saji and I made our way toward a certain place after school, and we began to chat along the way.

“Shinra-senpai is going to make an official debut as a writer!?”

I was totally surprised! Out of the blue, I had learnt that she was going to officially debut as an author!

“Yeah, it’s probably the biggest surprise that came out of that match.”

Saji noted. According to him, after that match, several publishers from the Underworld contacted Shinra-senpai, and it seemed likely that she would officially become a writer. Apparently, many women in the Underworld are highly interested in the contents of that doujinshi….

…But, I am absolutely opposed to being written about like that in a novel with Kiba! Having said that, it’s really hard to predict what might happen in our lives.

Whilst we conversed with each other, we got off the train at a station near Saji’s house and then went directly to his house. After the match, I decided to make a proper visit to Saji’s house. As soon as the door was opened, Saji’s younger brother Gengo-kun rushed through the hallway and appeared.

“Welcome home, onii-san! Ah, it’s Castella-oniisan!”

“Hey, you’re pretty energetic, Gengo-kun.”

He also seemed to remember me…but, I guess I'm 'Castella-oniisan'. Ah well. After entering his house, and on the way into his living room, I said to Gengo-kun

"So, I heard that you won a fight, Gengo-kun?"

When I said that, Gengo-kun looked extremely proud as he recounted the story to me.

"Well, I did this and this and then that, and that made Ryo-kun cry first!"

After hearing that, Saji reluctantly said,

"I see, that's amazing. Your brother…fought and lost."

Saji rubbed his little brother Gengo-kun's head as he looked at me and said,

"—But, your brother made his opponent see just how strong he was."

…Yeah, you're strong. You're really strong…and I think I want to have a rematch with you someday. But, I don't want another face-only punch-out anytime soon. Upon seeing my completely swollen face after the match, Xenovia immediately laughed, Asia immediately cried, and I was too tired to say anything else.

After a while, the intercom rang, and Saji went to answer the door—.

"Good day."

"Sorry for being late, Saji. I'll help you prepare."

Rias and Sona-senpai arrived. That's right! We actually decided to gather all of the new and old members of the

Occult Research Club as well as the Sitri team at Saji's place to liven things up! Since the match was over, we could have a meeting as fellow comrades. After hearing Sona-senpai say that, Saji replied in a panic,

"It's fine! My sister and I will do it, so please sit down President!"

Although Saji said that, Rias and Sona-senpai still occupied the kitchen and began to cook with the ingredients that they had brought along. Sona-senpai's culinary skills were devastatingly bad, so most of the work was actually done by Rias. While assisting both of them, Saji's little sister Kaho-chan took out some kind of package.

"By the way, Gen-nii. Sona-san's friend sent this over, it's meant to be for Gengo."

Everyone confirmed that the sender appeared to be from the Agares territory.

"…It's from Seekvaira."

Sona-senpai said. We opened the parcel — inside was a box with a plastic model, and a Blu-ray boxset.

"…A Gundam figure…and a Blu-Ray boxset?"

…I muttered…. But, as the recipient of the present, Gengo-kun lifted the plastic model's box up above his head and happily said,

"It's a toy robot! Onii-chan, let's make it, help me build it!"

"…A plastic model huh, I haven't touched any of those since the tanks I had in elementary school…"

Rias looked at the box and then said,

“Oh, there’s no need to worry, Saji-kun. This should be the latest model which is easy to assemble.”

“…Rias, how do you know?”

Rias suddenly said something that made it sound as though she was very familiar with Gundam figures, and it piqued my curiosity.

“It’s because you, Koneko, and even Seekvaira and Elmenhilde are so familiar with Gundam. As someone involved, I decided to look into it a bit. I started by watching all of the first generation.”

Seriously!? Even Rias watched Gundam!? It feels as though Seekvaira-san’s devilish influence is affecting us bit by bit! In order to avoid over-promoting it, she disguised her intent by pushing it softly, and she secretly preached about it so that Gundam infiltrated the midst of our ranks…. Eventually, even the Tournament was affected by it, so it became impossible to ignore! …Perhaps Seekvaira-san’s terrifying combat plan has only just begun.

—After that interlude, the other members continued to gather at Saji’s house.

“Please excuse the intrusion.”

Kiba arrived.

“I bought a lot of things.”

Xenovia also brought various gifts over.

“Ah, let me help with cooking.”

Asia went into the kitchen. The Sitri peerage members also arrived one after another. After everyone sat down around the table, Nimura-san said

“Today is the celebratory party for Tsubaki-san’s debut as a writer!”

“…I feel happy yet also conflicted about this at the same time.”

Shinra-senpai certainly did have a rather complicated expression on her face. Saji’s little sister, Kaho-chan, revealed a sly smile as she said to Ravel,

“Ravel-san, please read Tsubaki-san’s book out loud again.”

As soon as she heard that, perhaps because she was actually in front of both me and Kiba, Shinra-senpai looked even more panicked than that time, and she loudly protested!

“P-Please stoooop—!”

Like that, the party began…and Saji casually asked his little brother Gengo-kun,

“Gengo, are you happy today?”

As Gengo-kun looked at all of his brother’s friends and comrades who had gathered in the living room, he grinned from ear to ear and said,

“Yup! Everyone is so much fun, I’m so happy! Onii-chan, it’s great that you have so many friends!”

Indeed, Saji has a lot of friends, doesn’t he?

Hey, Saji. I’m going to come over to your house in future as well. Although the situation was different during the match, under normal circumstances, you and I have a true ‘line’ that connects us — as friends. I hope we can continue to get along with each other for a long time to come—.

Afterword

Long time no see. It’s Ishibumi here. Although this is a DX volume, it began with a completely fresh draft this time. Here’s a quick summary of the main points.

Sairaorg versus Cao Cao! I’d always wanted to make this battle a reality. As the writer, I hoped to use the past struggles of their lives to establish a rivalry between the two of them. Cao Cao’s past…is also quite tragic.

The illusionist in Cao Cao’s team, Marsilio made his original debut in the limited edition story [Rias in Wonderland] in the [Fantasia Bunko 25th Anniversary Book], and in a sense, this book is considered to be the final part of the Hero arc (third chapter), so please check it out if you’re interested.

This is Perseus’ first appearance. Well, it was only natural considering the members who left. In addition, almost all of the former Hero Faction members have re-adjusted their Balance Breakers to become Abyss Side types.

Next is the battle against the Sitri team. I thought about various ways in which Ravel and Sona could have a battle revolving around tactics and strategy, but when I thought about the situation from Ravel’s point of view, I had doubts such as ‘To begin with, since she has both Ise and Bina as trump cards, would she actually face Sona fairly in a tactical contest?’. That’s why I decided to write about a strategy that only Ise’s team could implement, and have Sona and the others struggle in the match. This time, it was a battle which placed importance on the atmosphere and momentum, so there are many potential holes in it. There might be some

doubts about how Ouryuu was able to prepare so many talismans to cover a field of that size, but please tolerate and forgive this.

The battle between Ise and Saji…I've always felt that there were some things I couldn't write about in the fifth volume, so this time, I turned it into a raw face-to-face punching battle with the thought that 'this is the only way that these two guys can fight'. There were many parts of Saji's setting that I was unable to write into the fifth volume at the time, so I decided not to talk about Saji's background until they had a rematch, and that's why I've finally written about it after twenty odd volumes.

The Balance Breaker of Artificial Sacred Gears — the first appearance of [Counter Balance]. Actually, the concept for this already appeared in the special novels included with the Blu-rays of the third anime season. The [Counter Balance] forms for some of the Sitri peerage members were not introduced this time, and I hope to have the opportunity to write about them sometime in the future. In principle, all of them have attained it though.

Ah, Seekvaira appeared this time as well. The DX series is her main battlefield, and she will definitely appear again in the future.

The following are my acknowledgements. Miyama Zero-sama, Editor T-sama, thank you again for helping me. I am always indebted to you.

I have an announcement to make that has previously been published by [Fantasia Beyond] and Kakuyomu — the [The Fallen Dog God −SLASHDØG−] story which has a shared world with [High School DxD] will be published as a paperback by Fujimi Fantasia Bunko. The illustrator will be

Kikurage-san. While it is naturally a continuation of the web-novel version, I hope that as the series is released in paperback that you will continue to support it alongside DxD's main story and DX until the end. Currently, the first volume is scheduled to be released in November. Please follow the information released in Dragon Magazine for more details. So, please continue to watch over the story of Hyoudou Issei, as well as the story of Ikuse Tobio which takes place before that.

Also, I made an account (a long time ago) with Kakuyomu.

URL: https://kakuyomu.jp/users/ishibumi_ichiei

I think it would be interesting if I posted anything there. I think that the top priority will be DxD (main story + DX) and Slash Dog, so please wait patiently and consider yourself lucky if something is posted onto that webpage.

Next, DxD Volume 24 + Slash Dog Volume 1 will be released simultaneously. At last, the qualifying round of the World Tournament comes to an end! Not only will Rias' team take on Vali's team, Ise's team will also finally fight against the God-class team of Vidar and the others! Koneko and Kuroka will be the main heroines of the next volume! Which sixteen teams will make it through the preliminary round!? Please stay tuned for the next releases of the Breast Dragon Emperor and the Dog God!

(Part 1 of 1) (26/3)

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